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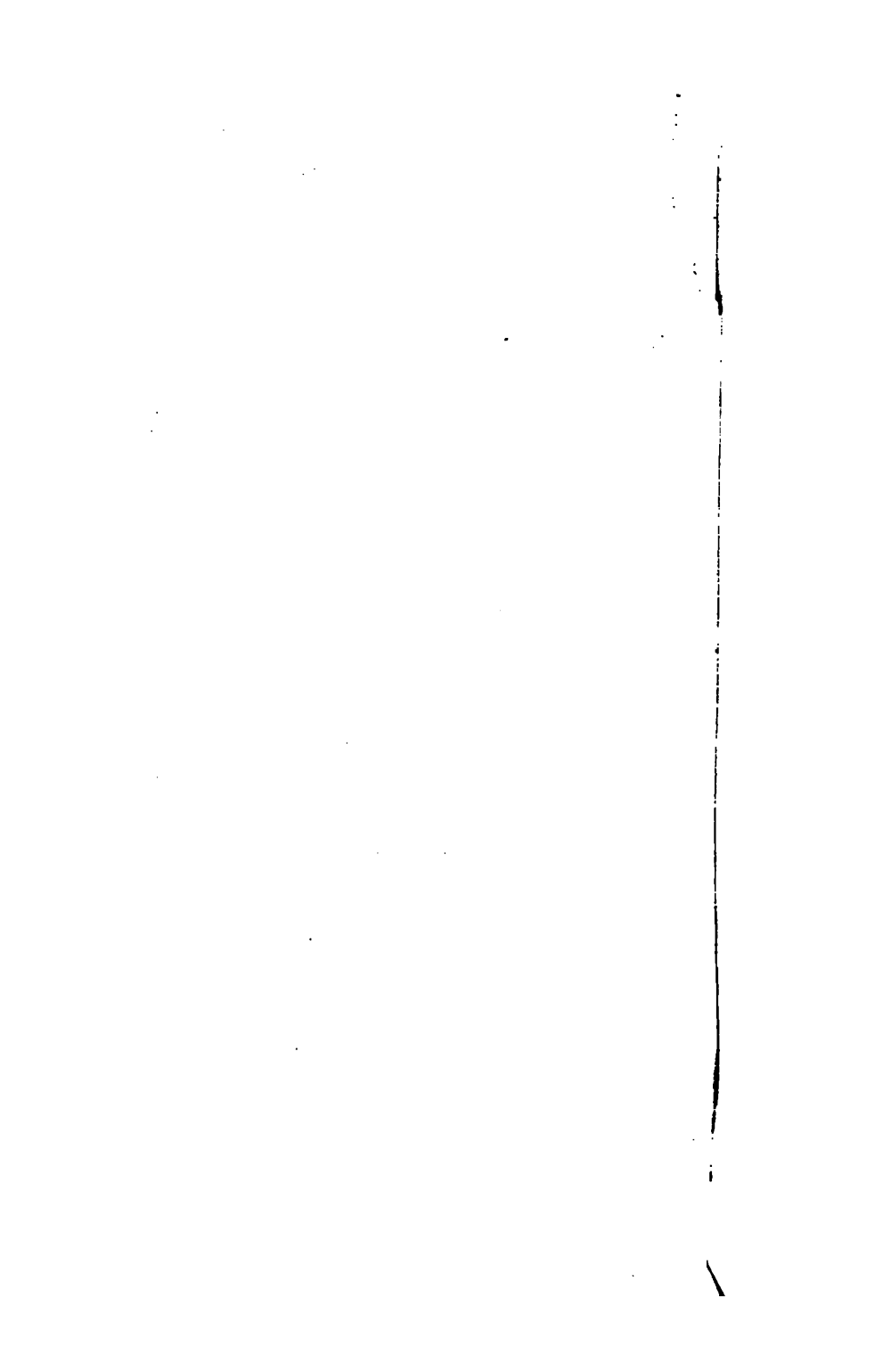
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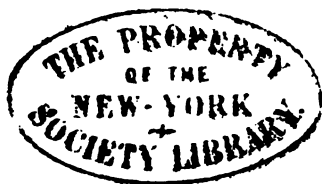








A WASHINGTON SYMPHONY



BY

MRS. WILLIAM LAMONT WHEELER

AUTHOR OF "STRAY LEAVES FROM NEWPORT"



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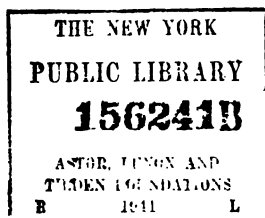
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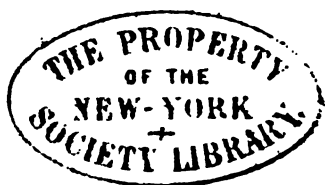


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TO
WASHINGTON'S POPULAR HOSTESS
MRS. FIELD
WIFE OF THE EMINENT JURIST
THIS LITTLE STORY IS INSCRIBED
A SLIGHT TOKEN OF THE
AUTHOR'S REGARD



A WASHINGTON SYMPHONY

CHAPTER I.

THURSDAY was reception day during the season at one of the best-appointed houses in Washington, presided over by a society leader endowed with the fine tact which enables its possessor to collect the choicest materials of the social *menu*, and to so assimilate them that the tastes of all present are sure to be gratified. Elbow-room was also one of the characteristics of this *salon*, which the hostess never allowed to become so crowded as to prevent a comfortable circulation of mind and body.

It is often asserted that only mediocre persons are universally popular. Mrs. Leigh-Scott was certainly an exception to this rule, for she was very far above mediocrity, and she was one of the most popular women in Washington. A brilliant conversationalist, she was also what is perhaps more rare, a sympathetic and intelligent listener. She was, moreover, a woman

of heart as well as brains ; nothing delighted her more than to divine the trump thought in the mind of a diffident talker, and to lead up to it, thus giving an opportunity for successful play in the conversational game, and winning for herself the gratitude of flattered *amour propre*. Yet, strange to say, this popular woman had no enemies ; there was a *bonhomie*, a personal magnetism about her, which disarmed criticism and took the sharp edge from the tongue of rancor, usually so busy with the moral dissection of men and women of any prominence in a community. Mrs. Leigh-Scott was a Bohemian in her tastes and inclinations, seeking her kindred spirits without regard to their money or position. She had the courage of her opinions, but she never did startling things, and her entertainments were always in keeping with good taste and within the limits of her income ; her delicious little suppers and dinners were never beyond the culinary powers of her *cordon noir*, whose roasts, done in a tin oven before the fire, preserved the distinctive taste of the meat, and whose soups and sauces were equal in delicacy to those of any French *chef*, while the wines and cigars which were served at these artistic feasts would have met with the approbation of the gastronomic expert of New York's Four Hundred. It was therefore not surprising that invitations to such choice

entertainments were eagerly accepted by the fortunate recipients.

There were two points in the management of her household upon which Mrs. Leigh-Scott was the more particular from having been often annoyed and surprised at their non-observance by persons who ought to know better. One was the prompt response to the door-bell by man- or maid-servant in proper attire. Another was that her servants were forbidden to say "engaged" at the door, Mrs. Leigh-Scott holding that when the mistress of the house was "out" of that portion in which visitors were received, the word was strictly true. But a visitor once admitted, and the card received, under no circumstances, save those of the most urgent necessity, would this thorough-bred woman deny herself.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott had outlived the illusions of life. She had outlived happiness, but it was much to have had that greatest happiness life can afford and to be able to live in its retrospect. It kept warmth in her heart and light in the dark, expressive eyes, which contrasted so well with the clear, fine-grained skin, only washed with pure water, and with the once black hair still so abundant and so artistically powdered by time and sorrow. Her sweet smile was tinged with sadness, but the rows of nature's own teeth gleamed beneath the parted

lips as brightly as did the diamonds with which she relieved the sombre hue of a dress which she had preserved ever since the color had gone out of her life.

To get the most out of life is the duty of every one, and creature comforts and administering to the comfort of one's fellow-creatures seemed all that life could offer to her now. She loved youth and youth loved her; she gathered about her spring flowers and brightened her lonely path and the immortelle in her heart with their beauty and fragrance; she filled her house with lady-slipper, bachelor-button, and marguerite, as well as full-blown roses from the social conservatory; she collected around her the best brain-workers, and bread-winners, men of all parties, women with ideas, artists who had made their mark or who were entitled to make it; yet with all this abundance of intellectual wealth, there was never too much, the attraction offered her guests never palled upon their satiated palates. How seldom that can be truly said of any entertainment!

Shortly after the loss of her husband, Mrs. Leigh-Scott joined her only brother, who was an artist in Paris. His death, which occurred some years later, then broke up her home there, and she was persuaded by some friends to accompany them to Japan, where she became so

fascinated with the novel life in that interesting country that her friends in America almost despaired of her return to them. But gradually a feeling of home-sickness and a longing for old associations became so strong with her that she returned to the United States and purchased a house in her native city, glad to find an interest in remodelling it to suit her own ideas and in stamping her own personality upon its every detail.

In establishing herself in Washington Mrs. Leigh-Scott was not actuated by the desire to solve the problem Mrs. John Sherwood argues so ably in her drawing-room discourses : the feasibility of establishing a *salon* in American society. There was for her the interest of assisting with her woman's tact a cousin of her husband who had recently been elected to Congress. This cousin was all that remained to her of the blood and name of the man she had so dearly loved, and she was anxious that Maurice Scott should acquit himself with credit in the new sphere upon which he was about to enter. The newly elected member from a New England State, though a college graduate and a lawyer of considerable ability, who had had the advantage of cultured parents and the early association of a refined home, had passed most of the years of his maturer life in the seclusion of the village in which he was born, where he had little inter-

course with the outside world, rarely leaving home except in the interest of his clients or to stump the State for his Presidential candidate. Absorbed in politics and law he led a lonely life in a corner of the old homestead, the greater part of which he had closed on his accession to the family estate. Though he constantly announced his intention of marrying for the purpose of keeping up his name, at fifty he was still a bachelor. With the neighboring farmers he was an oracle, for they were much impressed by his articles in the local journal, liberally seasoned with classical quotations, which, not understanding, impressed them all the more. They all agreed that Maurice Scott was a master-hand with his pen, and that his speeches had plenty of backbone in them. His nomination for Congress by his fellow-citizens was therefore a foregone conclusion, and as his State was carried by his party that year, he was elected.

Although Maurice Scott affected with his constituents an indifference for the "frills of fashionable life," as he expressed it, he was conscious of his shortcomings in social matters, and nervous with regard to his entrance upon a Washington career, where, for his own sake and that of his position, he was anxious to do the right thing. When, therefore, Mrs. Leigh-Scott wrote him a kind letter, offering to assist him

in the intricacies of social etiquette, he was secretly rejoiced, for, on the few occasions when he had met his cousin's charming wife, he had greatly admired her appearance and appreciated the quiet, well-bred way in which she had interested herself in his pursuits and in conversation put him at his ease. But like many constitutionally shy men, rendered still more so by the desire to appear at ease, he was too proud to confess the extent of his thankfulness for her offer. He wrote a stiff, ungracious acknowledgment of her letter, saying that while he should be glad to receive the benefit of her counsel in all matters in which she was so proficient, he could not think of trespassing upon her hospitality even for the few days for which she kindly invited him, but would go directly to a hotel; that, being a man of simple tastes and with little inclination for the gay society of which she was such an ornament, his whole attention during his residence in Washington would be given to representing his constituents in a manner worthy of the great honor they had done him.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott smiled to herself as she read the stilted sentences, beneath which she also saw the spirit which prompted them. She was not surprised, therefore, when the Hon. Maurice made his appearance, to hear from him that he had spent several days at Willard's,

where he had met a number of acquaintances—the fact was he had been wretchedly lonely wandering about the corridors—and where he intended to remain for the present. It suited him, he said, far better than newer and more pretentious hotels.

“You will at least give me the pleasure of your company at dinner,” said his hostess, and then, seeing the strongly marked lips about to form a refusal, she added: “I am all alone to-day, and I count upon your escort this evening to a lecture by Lt. — upon Greenland, which you know he describes from actual observation, and will illustrate with stereoscopic views. I am sure you will be interested.”

He accepted the invitation under protest. He had already dined, he said, much earlier in the day—he should keep to his rural hours, late dinners were the ruination of health,—but he would call her dinner supper, and he thought he should like the lecture, especially, he added, with a show of gallantry, “in such charming company, although he was not much of a ladies’ man.”

“Washington will make you one,” she interrupted, with a smile; “you will see too many fascinating women to remain long proof against their attractions.”

As the dinner proceeded, his hostess was inwardly amused to see how much her good

cheer was enjoyed, and how her guest partook of each course, while from time to time expressing his surprise that she could retain her admirable health with such rich daily food, and the rush of engagements she appeared to have.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott quietly replied that her observation told her, residents of the city, as a rule, look more healthy and appear to enjoy life more than persons who live all the year round in the country. "I think," she said, "that plenty of exercise for mind and body, with well cooked, attractively served food, are requisites for good health. Cooking is an art which is not sufficiently well understood. I expect to make you a convert to my opinion in this and other matters," she added, smiling. "Your Websterian countenance will show the result of Washington life in a few weeks."

He liked to be told his was a Websterian style of face. He had deep-set eyes with heavy brows under a broad forehead and a massiveness in face and form. He made his barber cut his abundant locks in the same way in which the portraits of the great Daniel show his to have been worn, and, indeed, his general appearance was not unlike that of the sage of Marshfield.

The descriptive trip to Greenland and his fair companion's genial society gradually thawed out the frigidity of manner in which the country

member had deemed it becoming his dignity to encase himself. The pleasant oyster supper in the cheerful dining-room, which followed the lecture, concluded one of the most enjoyable evenings, as he confessed to himself, that he had ever spent. The charm of this delightful, easy intercourse once experienced, in spite of his habits of reserve, Maurice Scott could not resist the attractions of his cousin's house. He often went there, but at an hour when he was likely to find her alone, for, beside his dread of meeting a bevy of gay society women, by whom he imagined her surrounded at her receptions, he was anxious to talk with her upon the subject nearest his heart.

He longed to launch forth as an orator, to hold his audience spellbound, to become a power in the legislative halls of his country, whence his name should be borne to the world at large on the waves of fame. To all of which aspirations Mrs. Leigh-Scott listened kindly, as well as to the lengthy speeches the member wrote out with a view to their coming into play on the first favorable occasion. His hostess frequently made suggestions of sentences to be omitted or to be amended, she pruned his somewhat exuberant style, and gave him a great deal of sound advice on various subjects.

All this which he had the good sense to

appreciate served to cement their friendship and gave her new interest in life.

One afternoon just before Mrs. Leigh-Scott's dinner hour, Maurice, wishing to talk to her about a speech he had made that day upon a bill in which he was interested, hastened to her house. He understood from the servant that Mrs. Leigh-Scott was in the library, and he rushed impetuously through the square oaken wainscoted hall, and pushed aside the draperies, expecting to find her seated in her favorite chair near the pretty old-fashioned desk which stood in the only corner left free by the dwarf oaken bookcases filled with choice volumes of her favorite authors. Each bookcase was surmounted by a bronze bust of poet or novelist, and from the octagon corners of the ceiling looked down pictures of famous actors, painted by the clever woman who had designed the room, a pupil of Carolus Duran, and also of John La Farge; one who is doing her part in solving the problem of woman's right with woman's might, by taking her place side by side with man, in the foremost rank of her profession.

A rich Turkey rug covered the floor, and the windows were marvels of stained glass, through which a soft light pervaded the room. Light curtains of pale yellow added to the fine effect of the whole, which was enhanced by a lumi-

nous iron lamp hung at either corner of the apartment, and by others in silver of exquisite workmanship, disposed on the several tables, near chairs and sofas, in this most luxurious of reading-rooms. Three steps led from the library to a larger apartment beyond, across which hung *portières* of silver canvas, embroidered with Cupids wreathed with roses, the whole marvellously beautiful. Maurice pushed them aside and found himself in the music room, from which a faint murmur of voices had reached him. He stood hesitatingly on the threshold of the tessellated floor, where no carpet or rug muffled the tone of harp or piano, his eyes wandered over the frescoed dancing-girls on walls and ceiling, and over the Loves and Graces on the satin backs and seats of the white and gold Empire chairs and sofas. Mrs. Leigh-Scott was not there. But in a shorter time than it takes to describe the graceful movements of the woman who, though foreign-born is naturalized in the hearts of all Americans who have known the power of her voice and smile, Maurice Scott felt his hand grasped and himself drawn towards a chair by the siren whom he had loudly applauded the evening previous at Albaugh's Opera House when she had talked English far better than Joséphine, Empress of the French, whom she personated, ever could have spoken it. And

she had talked with eyes and beautiful smile a language which was most explicit even to those who failed to catch the French accented words. "I saw you last night in the theatre," she said; "Mrs. Leigh-Scott wanted you to come to her box, I was there between the acts, why did you not come, you naughty Mr. Webstair?" She rattled off the words with a volubility which quite dazed her auditor, even if he had not been spellbound by the charm of tone and manner all her own. He was puzzled too, for the artiste wore, as she always does in private life, her own jet-black hair, fringed low upon her forehead, and he had only seen her the night before in the brown *chevelure* of the Empire days, suited to the part of Joséphine. He stammered, hesitated, and felt far more embarrassed than he had done that morning when he had addressed the House. His fair enchantress came to his assistance. "This is Miss Stella Fontaine," she said, and the young girl seated near the harp, which stood by the piano, rose at the mention of her name.

"Miss Fontaine is Mrs. Leigh-Scott's David. You surely must have heard of 'little David.' She has come to stay just as long as she will." "As long as I can," interrupted the young girl, smilingly putting out her hand to Maurice Scott. It was a very small hand, suited to the slight delicate form clad in Empire gown of

amber crape, a yellow rose in her dark hair, which curled in large rings over her forehead. She had great liquid deep-blue eyes and arched brown eyebrows, a shade lighter than her hair. There was in her face a quaint expression, a demureness which the droll look in her bright eyes belied.

"And you torture your fingers with those strings?" Maurice said, moving towards the harp, at which he looked and then at the youthful musician. He said it to say something, and to relieve his own awkwardness. She laughed lightly, and so did her companion, who took the little fingers in her own, pointing out the hardened ends, as she said: "Wonderful fingers! they make beautiful music. Are you fond of music, Mr. Webster?"

"My name is Scott, Maurice Scott," he answered. "No, I don't care much for music, though I think I should like to hear her play that thing. I don't see how she can do it."

"Mlle. calls you Mr. Webster," said Stella, "because Mrs. Leigh-Scott says you look like Daniel Webster. Oh, yes, Mr. Scott, I have heard of you; I understand you are going to make a great speech against the McKinley bill."

"Oh, the MacKeanley beal, you must keel that beal and get the thanks of all the ladies. We can have no more pretty French dresses on account of that horrid MacKeanley beal."

"But McKinley looks like Napoleon, your dear Napoleon. What do you say to that, Joséphine?" asked Stella.

"I say he must keel the MacKeanley beal," was the decided reply. "And now, I must go, Good-by, dear little David," and the artiste threw her arms around the small frame and completely covered it with her tall, commanding figure. Then, offering her hand with a fascinating smile to the bewildered country member, she said, "Good-by, Mr. Webstair, you must come and see me play to-night."

"Indeed I shall, and clap you too," he replied, fervently. She smiled again upon him and swept out of the room, her long garments brushing against him as he held back the curtain of the door for her to pass.

"So you and my David have already become friends," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, entering the music room some time later and noting with a smile the rapt expression of Maurice Scott as he leaned back in the most comfortable of arm-chairs, with his eyes fixed upon Stella, who was playing *Il Ballo in Maschera* upon the harp.

"I have been trying to do the honors of the house in your absence, Mrs. Leigh-Scott," said Stella, rising and kissing her hostess. "How long you were at that committee meeting; is the programme all arranged?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, dropping

into a chair, "at last ; but of all difficult things, the most difficult is to satisfy a lot of amateurs who all want to take the best parts. You, Stella, are to play the harp."

"Dear Mrs. Leigh-Scott, and I have not practised."

"Not a word, my child ; you will have plenty of time before the *tableaux* come off. No fear of your not doing justice to yourself. Miss Fontaine," she said, turning to Maurice Scott, who still seemed lost in contemplation of the young harpist, "is a born musician. And now, my dear fellow," continued his hostess, "I must send you off to dress. You must come back as quickly as you can. We dine in half an hour"—looking at her watch,—“to be in time for the play. Provide yourself with the handsomest bouquet of violets you can find to throw to Joséphine. Not another word,” as he was about to speak,—pushing him towards the door. “Be off, we will discuss your speech later, I know all about it, I heard Sidney Albright say you did admirably. There, go !”

Maurice Scott returned promptly in half an hour, not only with the violets, but also armed with an immense bouquet of American Beauties, which he handed to Stella.

“How exquisite !” she exclaimed. “Do see, Mrs. Leigh-Scott, what lovely roses ! It was so kind, so very kind of you to bring them to

me," she added, with a grateful smile for the donor, as she buried her small face in the flowers.

Maurice Scott continued to be kind to "Miss David," as he called her, not only in the way of sending her beautiful flowers, but also in escorting her to the Smithsonian, the Capitol, the Treasury, and to other points of interest in Washington, where, from his general knowledge, he proved a valuable *cicerone*.

"I like him so much," said Stella, on her return one day from the Corcoran Gallery, where Maurice had taken her to see that exquisite bit of sculpture, *Gli Ultimi Giorni*, which so touchingly depicts the last days of Napoleon. "We took the step from the sublime to the ridiculous," she said, "for while my heart was going out to that pathetic, sad face, a woman touched me on the arm and asked: 'Is that really poor Mr. Corcoran sitting there in his night-shirt, after giving all these fine pictures to the city? The janitor said I'd find him large as life, but I did think he'd have on some good clothes, so rich as he was too.' I was so convulsed with laughter," continued Stella, "that I was obliged to move away to another part of the gallery, while Mr. Scott kindly set the woman's mind at rest by pointing out to her Mr. Corcoran in full-length canvas, faultlessly attired, even to his polished boots, hat in hand, fronting the staircase."

"I think, David, that you were born in the seventeenth century and kept over; you are not one bit like other girls," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott one day when her guest was begging off from a dance at the English Embassy that evening, to which her hostess was anxious she should go.

"Should you like me to be like other girls?"

"No, for then you would not be half so interesting," was the reply. "But I want you to go and enjoy yourself; you like dancing, you dance so beautifully. A belle like you ought not to stay at home spending a stupid evening."

"As if it could be stupid with you," protested the young girl. "I do love dancing better than anything but you, dear Mrs. Leigh-Scott, and my harp. Please let me stay at home to-night and play to you."

"Ah, my dear child, I fear you are playing upon the heartstrings of Maurice Scott, he has been so devoted, and I notice a much greater attention to his appearance since he made your acquaintance."

"Mr. Scott only looks upon me as a good listener. By the way, I almost forgot that he said there was to be a lively discussion upon the silver question in the House this morning, and two or three women are to be admitted to practise in the Supreme Court. Shall we go and see them sworn in?"

"How does it happen, Maurice, that you, a good Democrat, should be such an admirer of Daniel Webster, who was a Whig, which means Republican now?" asked Mrs. Leigh-Scott, as the two ladies, escorted by the country member, descended the steps of the Capitol.

"Daniel Webster was the type of a grand American, compelling universal homage by the right divine of mind. Besides," he added, "genius is not confined to party or to sex, it is sometimes found in the slight form of a girl"—and he turned to Stella as he spoke—"who may weigh only—I think you said—eighty-six pounds?"

"I weigh eighty-nine pounds, Mr. Scott; please don't deprive me of the three I have gained since I came to Washington. But fancy my getting a compliment under the wing of the great Daniel Webster. How shall I show my gratitude? I shall have to play you to sleep," she added, archly, "as I did the last time."

He protested that she was quite mistaken; he had only closed his eyes for a moment, overpowered by the melody and the dazzlingly bright eyes of the musician.

"A very pretty speech, Maurice," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, who had overheard the words, but she and Stella exchanged meaning glances, as they both remembered how, while the harpist was playing, he had started up suddenly, awak-

ened by another instrument from which he had unconsciously sounded a deep, discordant note, and how when the harp stopped abruptly, Mrs. Leigh-Scott had asked: "Did you break a string, Stella?" and both had laughed heartily at the confusion of poor Maurice, who very shortly after took his leave on the plea of extreme fatigue consequent upon Congressional duties.

CHAPTER II.

"WHERE is Miss David?" asked Maurice Scott one morning of the sole occupant of the library in the pleasant house in H Street. The servant, thinking him a privileged person, had admitted him at this unusual hour for visitors.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott looked up in surprise from her writing-desk, as she extended her hand, while a smile of deep meaning curved the corners of her mouth, and she kept her eyes fixed upon him in inquiring silence for a few minutes.

He colored, walked about the room with a preoccupied air, and finally dropping into a chair beside her, took up from the table an old envelope and began to twist it between his fingers, while he kept his glance averted from the penetrating one he felt was upon him.

"You are always wanting me to marry," he said at last. "How would she do for a wife?"

"If by SHE you mean Miss Fontaine, she would do admirably for the right sort of man."

"How would she do for me?"

"Not at all."

"And why, pray?"

"For a number of reasons; for one, she is too young for you."

"Miss Fontaine is much older than her years, and she certainly is serious in her tastes. Suppose you sound her as to her views."

"I should think from what I accidentally overheard of your conversation the other day, that you had already sounded her. I heard you tell her that you were sure country life would agree with her, that one of your neighbors had a wife who only weighed eighty-six or eight pounds when she was married some ten years ago, and that now she turns the scale at one hundred and forty. That was offering great encouragement to an aspirant for flesh."

"I would give her a horse to ride," said Maurice, as if following his own thoughts; "diamond ear-rings and the handsomest diamond ring to be had in Galt's store," and warming with his subject, he tramped up and down the room in a way most distressing to the nerves of the sensitively organized woman who watched his measured steps.

"My dear Maurice," she exclaimed, "do sit down and curb your impetuosity, if you can. My David is far less of a materialist than you imagine. She would never be caught by diamond ear-rings, which, besides, are quite out of fashion. The horse might have more weight; Stella adores animals."

"Could n't you say something to her for me? She thinks so much of your opinion," he said, resuming his seat and looking earnestly at Mrs. Leigh-Scott.

"No, I could not advocate your cause," was the decided reply, "for I do not approve of such a disparity of years as lies between you, to say nothing of your entirely different tastes. I am sure Miss Bracegirdle would be a far more appropriate choice for you. She is a good, sensible woman, fine-looking, and highly intelligent. She would make an agreeable companion and keep your house well for you."

"Confound Miss Bracegirdle!"

"What has she done to deserve such a fate? I saw her smiling very sweetly at you in this very room, last Thursday. I think that would be an excellent arrangement."

"I suppose you'd like to marry your David to one of those foreign fellows always dangling about her. But foreigners want money; they won't marry a girl without."

"Mr. Fontaine is a lawyer in good practice. He has made successful ventures in real estate, and could afford a foreign son-in-law if his daughter's happiness should require. But there is no question of my marrying Stella to anyone. She is quite capable of choosing a husband for herself, and I am not in the least afraid of her making a mistake even if she

should marry a foreigner. Stella has a level head. Her heart will never run away with her reason."

"She might be deceived, as other girls have been," said Maurice; "a title dazzles the eyes of Americans; and it is well known that foreigners make bad husbands."

"That is a sweeping assertion," replied Mrs. Leigh-Scott, "and like most such has its bright exceptions. There have been happy marriages made by American girls with foreigners, instances here in Washington of foreign noble men, in the truest sense, who have chosen American wives without any fortune and made them very happy."

"I am surprised, Constance, that you, a good American as you call yourself, should advocate foreign husbands for American girls," said Maurice.

"I do not advocate anything of the sort," she replied. "I hope and believe that Stella will invest her affections according to the Monroe doctrine, 'America for Americans.' I think this the best country in the whole world to live and die in, and I hope my David may find a good American husband. But America has not taken out a patent for morality. There are fortune hunters and bad husbands here as well as in Europe; there are neglected wives in America dragging out lonely lives in their

solitary homes,—lovely women deserted for the club and the race-course, or for other women, by their unworthy husbands. There are plenty of practical Mormons outside of Utah. There are worthy men made wretched by flirtatious wives; the records of the divorce court show an alarming increase of matrimonial unhappiness, and it is because mutual affection and mutual tastes seldom form, as they invariably should, the basis of marriage. But," she continued, "I feel sure it will with my David; that, if she marries, she will not weigh the position, money, or nationality, but the merits of the individual. I feel sure she will marry a man able and proud to support her, whether he be American or foreigner. The man himself is the essential, 'the rest is all but leather and prunella,' as the poet says."

"Well," said Maurice, throwing himself comfortably back in his arm-chair, "the woman I marry will not have any cause to complain of me: I neither gamble nor drink; I seldom swear, only when very much aggravated; I don't care for the club, except to drop in for half an hour or so to hear the news; and I never flirt."

"I can answer for your solid qualities," said his hostess, smiling at the complacent manner in which he enumerated his good points. "You forgot to add that you are fine-looking, good-hearted, and able to support a wife."

"What more could she want?" he asked.

"It all depends upon the nature of the she," was the reply.

"I thought I had made it clear that I desire to marry Miss Fontaine," he said, somewhat impatiently. "Where is she?"

"Stella has gone to Annapolis for a visit of a month," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott.

"Gone to Annapolis," he replied, "what will she do there a whole month?"

"Thoroughly enjoy herself, I hope. The Commandant's family is charming, brass buttons dropping in whenever they can at his hospitable house, dances gotten up at a moment's notice, continual band-playing and drills. What can any girl desire more? Now Maurice, if Stella should fall in love with Uncle Sam's uniform and the American title of Lieutenant U. S. N., it would be all right, would it not?"

He said nothing but gazed moodily at the carpet for some moments, then suddenly looking up, he asked in an aggrieved tone, "Why did you not tell me at first that she had gone?"

"I could not stem the tide of your eloquence to find a chance," she replied.

"Well, I suppose," he said, resignedly, "there is nothing to do but wait until she returns."

"Nothing, unless in the meantime you should see some one who might suit you better. Don't let the conversation we have just had

stand in the way, if you should ; I promise to be discreet, Stella shall never know from me how near she came to receiving an offer of diamonds, horse, and Daniel Webster's likeness."

He seemed disposed to answer her, but thought better of it, and bending his brow darkly, rose and moved towards the door. Suddenly he turned. "I forgot to tell you, Constance," he said, "that Herbert Gray, the member from Minnesota of whom I spoke to you, would like me to bring him here. He can do more with his mouth than most men, whistles whole operas, sings like a nightingale, and he made one of the best speeches on the tariff to which I ever listened. He is one of the youngest members of the House and one of the brightest."

"By all means, bring this paragon here on Thursday, I shall have two pretty girls, nieces of the Spanish Minister, to pour out tea for me." Then with an arch look, she said : "Shall I ask Miss Bracegirdle to receive with me?"

"Miss Bracegirdle be hanged, she is——" the rest of the sentence was lost in the folds of the curtain pushed aside as with a farewell nod he left the room.

"Poor Maurice," thought his confidante, as the hall door closed with a bang, "what a pity he had not married earlier in life before his

habits became fixed, and when, if ever, he may have had some sentiment about him. He feels his lonely bachelor condition now and wants to marry, but he looks upon matrimony in the practical way, which would have little attraction for any one who cared for the flowers of life. And yet a good sensible woman who would be satisfied with a comfortable home, he would not look at. He only wants a wife to give him children, and to take care of his house, but he wants youth and beauty, and what has he to offer in return to the pretty bird whom he would cage? I cannot fancy for my David such an existence. She whose life is a living poem, adorned with the flowers of affection and sympathy she offers to those she loves. My David indeed! No, Maurice Scott, that tender flower is not for you to wear in your bosom!"

CHAPTER III.

“Do you sing, Mr. Gray?”

“As much as you like, provided I have an accompaniment,” was the frank reply. “Ah, there is Mrs. Nordlander, the best pianist in Washington; she often plays for me. Will you allow me to ask her?” and bowing gracefully to his hostess’ assent, the handsome young member of Congress made his way through a bevy of men and women of all ages, to a corner of the music room opening upon the conservatory, where, admiring a splendid azalea, he found the object of his search.

“Mr. Gray looks like the pictures of Father Damien before he went among those dreadful lepers,” said pretty Rose Bryer to a youth who was supposed to be entertaining the Senator’s daughter.

“Father what?” he ejaculated.

“Hush! he is going to sing.”

And it was singing worth hearing, when in a rich baritone he poured forth the beautiful lines of *On the Water*, to which the skilful pianist played a low accompaniment.

"Ah, you should hear it sung in Music Hall by the Boston Apollo Club," said the singer, after the burst of applause which succeeded the music had stopped. "Fancy sixty members of the club humming the sole accompaniment to one single rich voice! Though indeed," he added, "Mrs. Nordlanger seconded me most ably," and he bowed to the little German woman, whose false-front had become quite disarranged in the excitement of playing before such a critical audience.

"The words are pretty, are they not?" he said, turning to his hostess and showing her the sheet of music. "I got them from one of the Apollo Club. I will leave this copy with you if you like," he added, as Mrs. Leigh-Scott, who was an accomplished musician, expressed a wish to try it when she had leisure.

"Miss Fontaine, a young friend of mine," she said, "might adapt it to the harp when she comes back. She is away on a visit now, but she has her harp here and she plays it delightfully."

"May I call upon you and hear her?" he asked, eagerly; "I adore the harp."

"Most assuredly," she answered. "Come as often as you please, the oftener the better. It is such a delight to hear you sing; Stella, too, will be charmed with your music. Maurice," she said, laying her hand on the latter's arm as

he was trying to make his way towards Judge Chester who was evidently quite satisfied with his surrounding of several of Washington's brightest women, "Maurice, I cannot thank you enough for bringing Mr. Gray to me. He is a musical treasure."

"I knew you two would like each other," he answered, pursuing his progress through the room.

Then the little German woman struck the first bars of a love song in her native tongue, which caught the ear of the German Minister, an enthusiastic lover of music. He came quickly forward and listened with delight to the language made singularly harmonious by Herbert Gray's splendid voice, which rendered all the feeling the author had thrown from his own heart into the tender words. After that he sang some familiar English ballads, and at the request of pretty laughing Rose Bryer, he gave, with great effect, the nonsense song of *The Owl and the Pussy Cat*, which was rapturously encored.

He was indeed a great success, this beardless musical member of Congress, whose sound views on the silver question and the tariff were listened to with such deep attention by his colleagues with baldheads and bi-metallic locks. Yet with all his gifts, mental and physical, Herbert Gray was

unaffected and natural, as deferentially winning in his manners to women, as genial with men, and withal as boyishly frank, as though quite unaware of his attractions of rare voice, classic features, chestnut hair with a glint of gold through it, expressive mouth, and hazel eyes. His finely developed, broad-chested figure, which he carried in artistic costume of the present day, seemed to dwarf the stature of all the men about him, and caused him to become a striking personage in every circle in which he appeared.

"I am so glad you were pleased," he said, quietly, in response to his hostess' thanks for the pleasure he had given her guests and herself. "I enjoy singing, and it is a double pleasure to sing for those who are so kind as to like my music. I will sing for you whenever you wish," he answered to her invitation as he took his leave. "When are you most likely to be found at home, except on your popular Thursdays? When can I sing for you to criticise me? I am only an amateur, you know, and you have heard so many fine professionals that it is very good in you to praise my voice. Some evening then, and very soon," and with a winning smile he bowed himself off. He had a clear, sweet voice in speaking, not unlike that of Boston's magnetic preacher. Like him he had a rapid utterance; his thoughts seemed to

rush through his brain with an impetuosity that demanded an instantaneous supply of vehicles to express them. He never paused to form neatly turned sentences or to choose appropriate syllables, but found expressive words which were often most original and always carried the meaning intended.

"I have only spoken in the House when I have felt that I must say what I thought concerning questions at issue," he said when asked about a speech which had attracted considerable attention by its sound logic and stirring eloquence. "I did not in the least expect to speak, but I could not sit silent and listen to what aroused all the fire of my wrath, so I got up and talked. I just went right on ahead, and my thoughts worded themselves; you know they do when you feel with all the power that is in you."

He was sitting in the cosy library to which he had found his way more than once since his introduction to that pleasant house. It was a chilly evening, and the wood fire gave out an agreeable glow, while the fitful flame just made visible the rose-colored shaded lamps turned very low. It was an hour and a spot that invited confidential chat, and Herbert Gray felt the influence of his surroundings, while the evident interest his auditor took in his words led him to speak this evening more freely of

himself than he was accustomed to do. He talked with a simplicity and grace, a freedom from conceit, and yet with a quiet self-reliance that charmed his hostess, at the same time impressing her with a sense of his worth and of his coming influence. To Mrs. Leigh-Scott, the bright, vigorous tone of her visitor was most agreeable, in contrast to the sceptical, hard, worldly views of life continually expressed by men in official life. To the young member of Congress, the quick perceptions, the sound sense, knowledge of the world, and sympathetic attention of his listener seemed most helpful and delightful.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott had dined alone that day. She had wished to be alone with her own thoughts, this day recalling so vividly the brilliant sunlight of her past life, now but a memory lying behind the dark shadows of her present lonely existence. It was the anniversary of her wedding-day, of that marriage so fraught with happiness, a day once so joyously kept with the man to whom she had given her whole heart once and forever, to whom that heart still clung as fondly as ever, whose looks and words through all the years of their happy married life she often recalled with a memory almost incredible in its fidelity. She tried to comfort her aching heart with the recollection of the pure, noble record of the life so entwined with her own ;

she realized that she possessed the rare satisfaction of knowing that the heart for which her own still beat had always been true to her, that the husband of her choice had been a loyal one in every thought, word, and action. Still it was hard to sit in a desolate home longing, with a heart-hunger nothing could satisfy, for the clasp of the loved hand, the sound of the well-remembered voice, for the living presence of one ever present to her mind's eye.

"How can one ever forget?" she cried in her heart's anguish. "How can one ever wish to forget? No, even the want of living companionship, if one have companionship in thought, is better than mere presence of any other." And so all day she had dreamed over again those bright days which were now but a dream, longing with intensity for the drawing away of the curtain which divided her from all that once made life so dear. She had dreaded the intrusion of mere acquaintance, of any unhallowed footstep within the sanctuary of her sacred communing. She had denied herself to visitors, and had wandered restlessly about the house unfitted for any occupation. After dinner, which she had gone through with mechanically, having little appetite for the delicate dishes noiselessly served by her devoted "Jimmie," the colored man, who still retained his title of "boy," and who had lived with her so long that

he knew all his mistress' ways, and with genuine sympathy divined the cause of her unusual apathy,—after the cup of black coffee had concluded the scarcely tasted meal, Mrs. Leigh-Scott strolled into the music room, sat down to the piano, and played a few bars of one of her favorite airs, but the wind which had risen during the past hour now blew with a wild discordant sound and drowned all harmony ; the shrill blast jarred terribly upon her nerves ; it seemed to sound the requiem of all earthly hopes and joys.

How she wished for the touch of the little hand, the glance of the liquid, sympathetic blue eyes of her David, for the affectionate companionship which had so often brought solace to her tired, aching heart. She had thought all day until “ thinking itself had become a waste of thought,” and now this dreadful howling wind made thought impossible. It was a relief when a card from Herbert Gray was brought her, asking if she would receive him, he had a great favor to ask of her. She quickly answered in the affirmative.

“ And what can I do for you ? ” she asked, giving her hand to her visitor, whose entrance seemed to bring a lightness to the atmosphere of the room.

“ I am in somewhat of a quandary and I want you to help me out,” he replied, taking the seat to which she motioned.

"I am sure I will do what I can," she replied, smiling. "What is the difficulty?"

"I promised Mrs. Chester that I would sing *On the Water* for her next Monday, and I find that Mrs. Nordlinger, who is the best, in fact the only accompanist I can think of for that song, which requires a person who thoroughly understands music, is down with the grippe. I hate to disappoint Mrs. Chester, I have had so much kindness from her and from the Judge, yet I cannot accompany myself. What am I to do?"

"Perhaps," she replied, "I might play it for you. I have tried it, and if we were to go over it together——"

"Just exactly what I hoped you would suggest, although I did not dare to put it in so many words," he said, laughing to show his pleasure, "you have the reputation of being such a good Samaritan that I said to myself, 'If I throw myself on her kindness, Mrs. Leigh-Scott will help me herself with the accompaniment, for I know she is a thorough musician.'"

"Hardly that, but I will see what I can do. It is early yet, we will try it later, perhaps that dreadful wind may subside. Take a cigar meanwhile and let us talk of yourself. I am much interested in all my cousin tells me of his brother Democrat."

"Mr. Scott's political friendship causes him

to exaggerate my merits," answered Herbert Gray, accepting the lighted match his hostess proffered him and resuming the seat near her. They plunged into a discussion of the doings of Congress and talked over the leading men of both parties.

"I am not so young as I look," he said, in answer to a remark upon his youthful appearance; "I am over thirty."

"Is it possible? I never should have thought it."

"Indeed! I suppose I shall astonish you still more when I tell you that I have a daughter nearly seven years old."

"Is your wife living?" asked Mrs. Leigh-Scott, hesitatingly, with an intuition that there might be something painful in the inquiry.

"I do not know," he replied.

"You do not know?" repeated Mrs. Leigh-Scott, in astonishment.

"Do you care to hear the story of my life?" he asked. "It is a strange one; it may interest you."

"I am already interested. I felt when I heard you sing that you must have known sorrow, for

" 'The anguish of the singer
Makes the sweetness of the strain.'"

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully, "that is very true. I am a Boston boy," he continued; "my

father died when I was but ten years old ; my sister, 'Dimples,' as we always called her, a young child. We were very poor, for my father had speculated unfortunately, and left very little property. My young mother had all that she could do to keep the wolf from the door, but she struggled bravely and used the talents she possessed with a plucky, determined spirit. She gave music lessons (she had a magnificent voice ; all the musical talent I have I inherited from my mother). She embroidered exquisitely, and her needle also became a source of income. While I was attending the public school in Boston, a letter came to my mother from the Massachusetts Senator, an old friend of our family, who had taken a great interest in me, offering to get me the position of page in the Senate. He suggested my mother's going to Washington, where he thought he might get her a clerkship in one of the departments. He succeeded in both his kind efforts. I little thought when, a slim boy in jackets, at a signal I ran about the floor of the Senate, that I should one day sit in Congress, much less dare to open my lips there. Congress seemed to my childish eyes and ears a most formidable arena. I picked up considerable information in the course of my career as page. I gained good and bad knowledge ; the perceptions of my age quickened by the desire to appear knowing,

and constant observation of what went on about me, gave me more insight into human nature and the motives for men's actions than was altogether good for me. But I had a guardian angel in my mother. I had been accustomed to confide all my thoughts to her, and I was by nature a truthful boy;—the habit continued.

“My mother, anxious that my education should not be interfered with, had procured for me a competent teacher during the hours when I was free to study, and as the goal of my ambition since I could remember had been to go to the Boston Institute of Technology, she kept me up to the mark. Though comparatively contented with her life in Washington, she secretly pined for her native city. When I was about eighteen we returned to Boston. I entered the Technological Institute, my mother straining every nerve to keep me there; was assisted in a degree by our kind friend the Senator, who fully approved of my desire to make myself a competent engineer. I worked hard, graduated with honors, and finally a position of importance in the region of Lake Superior was offered me.

“What a hard-working, lonely life I led there, deprived of all congenial society, but learning that most important of life's lessons—to rely upon myself. One day there came a telegram which made life dark indeed to me; it brought

me my first great sorrow. The telegram was from my mother's physician, announcing her serious illness.

"I left everything, rushed on to Boston only in time to receive her last kiss. My sister Dimples was now between nine and ten years old, the brightest, prettiest of children. My mother's last charge to me was to take her to her former schoolmate, now Superior of the convent where she herself had been educated.

"It was a long, sad journey to that far off Western town, a few miles from which rose the gray walls of the home for life as it actually proved to my dear little sister. I little thought when she clung to me, in the tenacity of our parting embrace, that it was the forerunner of one still longer, and that the golden curls that clustered round her head would one day be shorn to give place to the nun's fluted cap and black veil of Sister Lucia. Yet the dimples are still there, and whenever I see her—for we meet from time to time—she seems happy and light-hearted. But ah, the Church's gain is my loss! Dear little Dimples! it was hard enough to give her up.

"I went back to my work," continued Herbert Gray, "but it had grown distasteful to me now that I had no one to work for, the Mother Superior having offered to take charge of my sister's education free of expense. I longed

for refined society, which I could not get in the place where I was living.

"I felt alone in the world without the letters which had come so regularly from my mother, without the thought that she was waiting to welcome me at any time when I might go to her.

"I decided to move nearer the convent, so that I might see my sister frequently. About this time a chance to make a good investment in real estate in a new and rapidly growing city presented itself. I took advantage of the opportunity, and was successful beyond my expectations. Then it was that I met the woman who has ruined my life.

"One of my fellow-students at the 'Tech.' had married and settled in the town in which I took up my residence. We had been friends in Boston. It was natural that in my loneliness I should gladly accept his many overtures for a renewal of our former intimacy.

"We formed a land company and expected to find an El Dorado in the large tract of former Indian reservation, which Government had purchased and put in the market, and in which we invested largely. That brought us still more together.

"I danced well, was fond of acting in amateur theatricals, played a good game of whist, and sang a little. I was therefore an acquisition

in a community where most of the sterner sex think more of business than of the cultivation of their minds or manners. Women, you know, as a rule, and especially American women, are far superior in refinement and accomplishments to American men—I was also looked upon as a good *parti*, a rising young man.

“My friend’s wife had a schoolmate, a pretty penniless orphan, who came to visit her (as I too late discovered) in search of a husband. I was often invited to meet the guest of my hospitable friend and his wife. I was cast for her lover in the play they got up. I took her to parties, to concerts, to the theatre at their suggestion, and at first nothing loth, for as she was a pretty girl I rather liked the unconventional intercourse, the freedom from chaperones, which so very wisely is not allowable in less provincial society. Is it not inconceivable,” he said, “that parents or guardians anywhere, who must know from experience the danger of these unrestrained flirtations in the full tide of youth, with its lack of knowledge of its own nature and its frequent mistake of passion for the nobler sentiment of love, should ever be so careless of their responsibility! The result of all this propinquity was what might have been expected, what, had I been less inexperienced, I might have anticipated. I was not really in

love with this girl, nay, as I saw more of her I often found her conversation silly, her manners bold. She lacked refinement, and my standard of woman was a high one.

"I had simply been drawn into attentions which on my part had meant nothing serious—like other young men I had enjoyed a flirtation which, as I knew the object of it better, began to lose its attraction. But I found I had unwittingly committed myself, that as an honorable man I was bound to offer myself to the girl whom I was plainly told by herself, as well as by others, I had compromised and whose affections I had won. Flattered by her evident preference, entangled in an inextricable web of circumstances over which I had no control, I grew desperate and asked her to marry me, which she smilingly consented to do.

"My friend and his wife congratulated us and said I was a lucky fellow. The engagement was a short one, but short as it was it was interminable to me. My bride-elect's demonstrations in public disgusted my sense of delicacy, and feeling my own want of reciprocity I often secretly regretted my impetuosity in taking the fatal step. But it was too late to withdraw, and I consoled myself with the thought that once married we should assimilate our lives to each other and settle down like other married people. We spent the honey-

moon in Europe, an arrangement that suited both of us, I longing for change of scene and my bride for the excitement of a European tour. We 'did' France, Germany, and Italy, and in a few weeks returned for an indefinite period to Paris, for my wife hated sight-seeing, travelling, after the novelty wore off, bored her, and she was impatient for shopping, which was all that the gay city represented to her. English, she discovered, was spoken everywhere and was a great advantage, as her French was extremely limited.

"I took an apartment in a quarter of Paris accessible to the Boulevard and the brilliantly lighted shops, which make an after-dinner stroll a gay supplement to a repast at one of the numerous restaurants. We frequented them all after the manner of most Americans in Paris—and for a time Alice was quite happy in the contemplation and enjoyment of this brilliant panorama. We had one taste in common, love of horseback exercise,—indeed I had been attracted to my wife in the early stage of our acquaintance by her fearless and graceful horsemanship. She never looked better than when well mounted ; she had a superb figure, and she knew it. The pleasure she derived from our rides in the Bois was quite enhanced by the admiring glances of all we met.

"In the absence of other mutual tastes I was

only too glad to encourage this one, and was always at her service as escort, sometimes we were joined by one or another of Alice's admirers, for her flirtations were numerous, though so varied as to cause me little uneasiness.

"I was glad to see her contented, feeling in my heart that I had little real interest for her and that our marriage had been a mistake, like many I saw around me. I determined, however, to make the best of things, and there was much in Paris to interest me. In default of domestic affection I turned to art and science, and while Alice was shopping or visiting with congenial acquaintances she had found in the American colony, I frequented the libraries and galleries and availed myself of the many opportunities for intellectual growth offered in this centre of civilization.

"Gradually my wife and I saw less and less of each other; she, wholly given up to frivolous amusements, had no taste for any other, and my society, as she plainly showed, bored her. She grew irritable, supercilious, and quite indifferent to expostulations upon her extravagance and recklessness of bills, which startled me, accustomed as I had always been to a systematic expenditure—and finding our present living far beyond my means. Wayward, ill-regulated, soulless, Alice's idol was self; vanity her motor. There was nothing in her character

to appeal to, and mutual recrimination marked our intercourse whenever we met.

"I had always been a student, always gone heart and soul into whatever interested me at the time; I became absorbed in examining the various points of interest bearing upon my profession, of which with all my other occupations I had never lost sight, my profession of civil engineering. I had ample occupation for my time, none for painful thought, and I was comparatively contented.

"Then Mildred was born, and the new young life brought a fresh charm to mine. Her mother showed little interest in the child, indeed she grudged its advent as interfering with her frivolous enjoyment. Maternal duties bored her, as the serious side of life always did, and she had no maternal feeling to sweeten these duties. The child repulsed by one parent was welcomed to the arms of the other. Mildred divided my time with my studies, gradually almost entirely diverted me from them. I gave to her all the love and devotion I might have given to a wife I could have loved. The child, who grew more interesting day by day, was quite neglected by her mother, who daily became more ardent in her thirst for admiration.

"When Mildred was about three years old I discovered a new cause for anxiety. My wife, who suffered constantly from attacks of neural-

gia, brought on by imprudent exposure to the weather and insufficient clothing at a ball, was in the habit of taking large doses of opium secretly, in order to allay the pain. The habit had increased to such an extent that she could not live without it. When I expostulated with her and explained how she was ruining her health, and the terrible effects upon the mind sure to result from this fatal drug, which has caused misery in so many households, she would angrily deny that she ever touched opium, and when one day, irritated beyond all patience by her perversity, I pushed up her sleeve and showed the marks of continual hypodermic injections, she still insisted that I was quite mistaken, and an unpleasant scene occurred.

“Now began a life of torture, for I had reason to believe that my wife, in my absence, was accustomed to receive visits and letters from men to whose attentions I objected. Doubly anxious on account of my child to prevent scandal, I was forced into playing a part revolting to my nature and degrading to the woman I had married—that of becoming a spy upon all her actions.

“One day a letter addressed to Mrs. Gray, and redirected to me, fell into my hands. It was no doubt sent me by a former maid of my wife, whom, after admitting to her confidence, the latter in a fit of anger had dismissed from her

service, and this was the revenge the unscrupulous creature had taken, after the manner of her kind.

"The letter was from an empty-headed coxcomb named Stimson, my pet aversion, whose chief recommendation to the set to which he and my wife belonged, was, that he supplied its members with gossip and thus paid for the dinners given him. The letter referred to a wager made at an entertainment in the American colony, at which Stimson had been present, that Mrs. Gray could ride better than the *équetrinne* of the Hippodrome, who, in the correct *mise* of the *haut école*, managed her superb black charger with incomparable skill. Stimson wrote that it would be a great lark if Mrs. Gray would for one evening take the place of Mlle. Lisette and prove that an amateur rider may excel a professional. There would be little difficulty in arranging the affair through Gideon Vane—M. Gideon as he was called in the ring, where my wife had applauded his riding.

"He was an American, Stimson had gone to college with him ; having run through a fortune the athlete of his class had turned up in Paris a circus rider. A light wig and a few artistic touches would effectually conceal Mrs. Gray's identity, and to secure the absence of a possibly troublesome husband, it was suggested that the escapade should take place the evening of

some engagement of mine, of which Stimson was to be informed in time to carry out his programme.

"My first impulse on reading this audacious epistle was to thrash the writer of it, and to threaten my wife with extreme measures should she thus disgrace herself and me, but a few moments' reflection convinced me of the folly of such a step, which would only create a scandal. Alice had not received the letter, she might be ignorant of Stimson's plan. A little diplomacy seemed the wiser course to take under the circumstances.

"Nerving myself for the interview, I entered my wife's dressing-room, a calm exterior hiding my inward feelings. She was seated in front of her mirror, her maid brushing out the long, thick red-gold tresses which owed none of their beauty to art. She looked up in surprise at my unwonted appearance, and when I pleasantly inquired after her health she bent upon me the cold searching glance her blue eyes so often assumed. I bore it unflinchingly, and said in my most amiable tones: 'How would you like to run over to England, Alice, for the Ascot Races next month?'

"Her face was a study as she looked at me in puzzled silence. 'Do you really mean it?' she asked, after a few moments. 'Perhaps,' and I looked significantly at the maid, who understood

English. At a sign from her mistress she left the room, and then I continued: 'On certain conditions I will take you to London to the races.'

"'And these conditions are?' she inquired, haughtily.

"'That you promise not to receive the visits of men to whom I object, that you consult me with regard to all your engagements, and that you give me the exact amount of your bills to your dressmaker and others that I may settle everything before we leave Paris. On these conditions I will shut up this apartment and take you to London for the season.'

"'What absurd nonsense,' she replied; 'one would think you were talking to a child. Well,' she added, after a short consultation with herself in the mirror, 'I consent; it is worth making a few promises to be at the Ascot Races, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show is in London now.'

"'Remember, you must keep these promises and give me all your bills,' I answered.

"A few days after this I was strolling along the Rue de la Paix, when I saw Alice's coupé in front of a shop and my wife's face bent forward in earnest conversation with a man who stood by the carriage door. As they caught sight of me he walked away.

"'Who was that?' I asked, after I had taken my place in the carriage as it moved off,

"She seemed confused for a few moments and kept her face averted, then in a careless tone, as I repeated the question, she replied :

" ' Oh, that was Gideon Vane. I don't wonder you did not recognize him. You have only seen him in his jockey dress. '

" ' And pray, how did you become acquainted with this circus rider ? '

" ' This circus rider, as you so contemptuously call him, is an old friend of mine. I knew Gideon Vane in America, long before I knew you, and, let me tell you, he is quite as much a gentleman as you are, if not more, ' she muttered.

" ' And pray, how often have you met your old friend ? '

" ' Oh, I don't know, once or twice, I 'm sure I can't tell, ' she added impatiently. ' Mr. Vane knows lots of nice people in Paris and is very much invited out. It is to his credit to do the only thing he can do for his living ; it is n't his fault that he has n't money. '

" ' Strange that you never spoke of your old friend, ' I said, thinking of Stimson's letter.

" ' Is it ? ' she retorted, turning quickly toward me. ' I think it would be stranger if I had, knowing your jealousy of every man who looks at me. If jealousy be a proof of love, defend me from it, ' and with this Parthian shaft she left me to enter the shop before which the carriage had stopped. I waited in it while my wife de-

cided upon the relative merits of the articles displayed to her. I reflected that, as we were to leave Paris shortly and there would be little likelihood of her meeting again with this old friend, it might be as well to let the matter drop. Alice appeared to have arrived at the same conclusion, for when she reappeared she was amiability personified, and no one who saw us driving home together would have guessed that the minds of both were filled with thoughts of our late passage at arms and that we were anything but a united couple. Little did either of us guess the terrible 'unexpected' which awaited us.

"Returning from a visit to my bankers a day or two previous to our intended departure for London, I found the apartment in the possession of the police, my wife in a terrible state of agitation. She could not speak coherently, but her maid, who was scarcely less alarmed, managed to explain that her mistress had been accused of taking some valuable jewelry, which had disappeared from a shop in the Palais Royal, which Alice frequented; that the proprietor had called upon her himself, wishing to recover his property quietly, but that Madame had treated him with scorn and indignation, also ordered him out of her presence, assuring him that she knew nothing whatever about the articles and would inform her husband of his

outrageous treatment of her, whereupon a domiciliary visit from the authorities had been made to the apartment and everybody in it had been searched and the jewelry discovered hidden in the mattress of Madame's bed.

"Imagine the horror with which I beheld my worst fears realized, for I had long suspected my wife of being a kleptomaniac, and had several times, in concert with her maid, sent back articles which the former had brought from shops, or I had paid for them when the owners had refused to receive the returned goods.

"Now there was no possibility of keeping the fact a secret—a prison or an asylum was the only choice remaining. As the physicians, who had from time to time attended Mrs. Gray, confirmed my statement of her irresponsibility, owing to the effects of the fatal habit to which she was addicted, after the tedious formalities necessary had been concluded I was allowed to place Alice under proper treatment, and selected an establishment where I was satisfied she would receive every care and kindness possible.

"Then, worn out in mind and body after the trying ordeal to which both had been subjected, longing for change of scene and thought, I took Mildred to Switzerland for the summer, resolving to break up all associations of the child's early life and to return with her to America as soon as possible.

“One day a letter reached me in Vevay announcing that a fire had broken out in a wing of the asylum in which I had placed Alice; the damage to the buildings had been slight and no lives lost, but in the alarm and consequent excitement my wife had escaped. I lost no time in returning to Paris, where a vigilant search for the fugitive had already been instituted, but in vain.

“There was little doubt in my mind that the fire was not the effect of accident, but that the affair had been planned by Alice and an outside confederate, and I speedily employed detectives to discover the whereabouts of Gideon Vane, who seemed to me the most likely to have instigated and assisted her flight. Alice, naturally fond of intrigue, had become an adept in deceiving those about her, and had won their goodwill and lulled to rest any suspicions of her designs by her extreme docility and apparent content with her surroundings. She often said to her attendants that her neuralgia had never troubled her so little; she chatted pleasantly with them and appeared appreciative of their kindness. She had thus time and opportunity to develop her plans, and that she had found means to communicate with some one, probably Vane, in spite of watchfulness, seemed to me conclusive.

“Weeks, months, passed and still no clue to

the mystery. I put the case in the hands of detectives in Europe and America, I employed every possible means of discovery, and I am to-day as ignorant as ever of the fate of the mother of my child. The general impression here is that Mildred is motherless; only you know the facts, and I do not know if Alice be alive or dead. After six months of fruitless search and of a life which was killing me, for I could not give my attention to anything but the one which detained me in Europe, leaving directions for any intelligence, no matter how slight, to be sent me, I returned with Mildred to America, resolved to bring up my child in the country of my birth, and to give her every advantage of association and education which might counteract any dangerous trait she may have inherited.

"I returned to my old home, devoted myself to politics, and was elected to Congress from my district."

"Yours is, indeed, a sad, strange story," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, who had followed Herbert Gray's recital with interest. "And your child, tell me about her."

"She lives with me," he answered; "I was fortunate enough to be able to get for her the faithful nurse who took care of my sister. Sarah Burke is devoted to Mildred, who, recognizing her own power, bullies and coaxes by

turns the good, devoted soul. Mildred goes to school for a couple of hours every day, the rest of the time she does pretty much as she pleases. She is a spoilt darling, bright, interesting and self-willed, at once my anxiety and my delight.

"I know," he said with a sigh, "she ought to have a woman's judicious guiding hand to direct her conflicting traits of character; hers is a positive nature, one which requires strong, firm, but delicate handling. I suppose the wisest thing I could do under the circumstances would be to send her to the care of the 'Sisters of the Holy Cross'; she would get excellent tuition and training there. But, to tell the truth, I dread the influence, which, with Mildred's highly strung nature and her passionate love of music, might drive her from me as it did my sister, my dear sister Dimples.

"Ah, if she could be my sweet little house-keeper now, as but for that nun's cap and veil she might, how happy it would make me! She would be an excellent monitress for Mildred, and the best instructress the child could have. But my sister Dimples is Sister Lucia now.

"Dimples would be of far more use in the world than out of it, and I cannot help believing she would be much happier living with me and taking care of Mildred than she can be shut up with all those good women,"

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"I pity you from the bottom of my heart," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, and all the sympathy of her nature shone in her eyes, which filled with tears as she looked at the splendid physique, the soul in the fine face before her, a life wrecked by the folly of an inconsiderate flirtation and the designs of others. "No," she said, answering her own thoughts, "you cannot be blamed for wishing death has parted you from one with whom God never joined you. What a terrible taking in vain of the name of the Deity that strange assertion often seems! I have been present at weddings which I felt convinced were purely bargains. I have wondered how they dared to take their impious vows, after the solemn adjuration to beware of marrying if there be any just cause why they should not. Surely a lack of mutual affection is a just cause."

"Yes," said Herbert Gray, his handsome mouth curling in a sarcastic smile. "If as rigorous an examination of qualifications for the holy estate of matrimony were required as by the Civil Service for its candidates, there would be fewer unhappy marriages and it would be better for humanity. How I loathe the infatuation, the act of folly which hung a millstone around my neck! I also have my ideal, I suppose," and he blushed like a school-boy; "you will laugh at me when I tell you

that for ten years I have preserved in my memory the picture of a child I once saw, a tender bud which gave promise of developing into a perfect flower. If I could find that child grown into a woman, I think I could wish to marry her—if I were free," he added, with a sigh.

"The sight of Miss Fontaine's harp recalled to me a scene which I have never forgotten. It occurred at the Academy of the Holy Cross, when I was present at the musical exhibition of the pupils. My little sister, who like the other children was dressed in white, with blue sash, and ribbons in the golden hair which curled over her ten-year-old head, presented me to her dearest friend and classmate, the petite harpist, who had a true musician's brow under her mass of dark hair and music in her liquid deep-blue eyes. She was so small that her little feet could scarcely reach the pedals, and when her little hands flew across the strings in Bozio's *Home Sweet Home*, it seemed really marvellous that such a mere child could indeed play the harp so well. I have never forgotten the impression she produced upon me. I suppose you think all this very absurd and romantic in a man whose hard experience might have knocked all romance out of him."

"Is true sentiment ever foolish?" asked Mrs. Leigh-Scott, earnestly; "how much happier we

should all be if there were more of it in ourselves and in those about us! No, I do not think you foolish. And now tell me more about your child. Is she like you?"

"This is her picture," he replied, taking from the breast-pocket of his coat a red morocco case which he handed her.

"What a sweet, roguish little face peeping out of that red-gold mass of curly hair! Yes, the eyes are like yours, and she has the same dimple in her chin. What an exquisite little picture! how natural the attitude, curled up in that tiny chair, with one chubby leg crossed over the other! Where was it painted?"

"In Dresden;" he replied, "I sent out a photograph of Mildred and a lock of her hair to an artist who had painted the child of a friend of mine. The result is very satisfactory, the coloring is Mildred's—she has her mother's hair,—I trust," he added fervently, "that it is the only thing she has inherited."

"You must bring her to see me," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, "I like pretty, bright children."

"I will do so with the greatest pleasure," he replied. "Mildred is certainly most original, she often amuses me with her droll ideas. The other day she begged me to give her one hundred dollars in gold, and when I asked her why she wanted it, she said she wanted to make a bronze thumb for George Washington's statue,

which the women of America were going to send to France, because France had sent to America a statue of Lafayette. Mrs. Chester was president of the society to get the money and had told her all about it."

"‘And I suppose you, being only a small piece of American woman, think a thumb would be about the right thing for you to give,’ said I.

"She nodded and laughed with delight at my penetration, and when I told her she should give a whole hand, she danced about the room for joy, then threw her little arms about my neck and hugged and kissed me in proportion to the five hundred dollars for which I drew her a check. We took it to Riggs' Bank, where she insisted upon its being cashed in gold, although I tried to make her understand that the statue had already quite a handsome bank account and the money could be deposited in her name, she would not be satisfied until I had driven her and her contribution tied up in her pocket-handkerchief to the Chester house and left her there to lunch with Mrs. Chester and Grandpa Judge.

Mildred loves to go to Capitol Hill, where she is so petted that she prefers that house to those where there are children. She is old for her years, unlike me, who am younger than mine. She often persuades me to take her to the Supreme Court to see the entrance of the gowned

Judiciary. and she bows gravely to her special Judge when he comes in with the rest, while he gives her a quiet smile in return. Mildred declares that 'Grandpa Judge' tells better stories than any she can read in books, and he appreciates the compliment for it takes a versatile as well as a clever mind you know to satisfy the enquiring intelligence of a bright child. But you must be tired of the eternal ego of my conversation," he said; "I ought to apologize for troubling you with a fond father's garrulity."

"Indeed I have been deeply interested, and feel as though this evening had brought a new interest into my life," said his hostess. "Let us form a compact of friendship between us three, you, Mildred, and myself,—a treaty of amity which shall be less elastic than international ones. You two are to confide all your cares and troubles to me, and I will give you both all the counsel of which I am capable. Is it agreed?"

"Indeed it is," he answered warmly, "and thank you so much for all your interest and sympathy in me and mine. I am a great believer in the ties of real friendship, and in the relationship of the soul, frequently much stronger than that of blood. People talk of blood being thicker than water. It often gets so clogged by envy and jealousies as to impede its healthy circulation and to interfere with the action of the

heart's best feelings among members of the same family. I think," he continued, laughing, "that family ties, in the wear and tear of life with all its misunderstandings and mutual recriminations, may become very hard knots, that hurt the feelings of those bound together in enforced or uncongenial companionship."

"Yes," she replied, "that is all very true. Often persons closely related have lived together for years, quite ignorant of the inner natures of each other, while a word, a look, a clasp of the hand from one met by chance, may serve as a magic key to unlock the most carefully closed heart."

"As your words have done to mine," he said, his voice hoarse with emotion.

She silently pressed the hand he held out to her, in tacit recognition of their compact.

"And now," Mrs. Leigh-Scott said, rising and leading the way to the music room, "let us see if I can accompany you in your song *On the Water*."

Was it the recent close companionship of thought which caused both player and singer to comprehend so fully the power and beauty of Abt's music and the sweet melody underlying the author's words? Certainly voice and accompaniment blended together in perfect harmony as Mrs. Leigh-Scott played the low soft music to which Herbert Gray sang:

“Soft the glassy waves are flowing,
Gently, gently let us glide ;
Golden stars and sunset glowing,
Flash upon the silent tide.
As the day and night are blending,
Floating o'er the waves along,
From the depths below ascending,
Comes a strange and ghostly song.

“The King's enchanting daughter,
Has swept the golden strings ;
And under the depths of the water
She sweetly, sadly sings.
She sings of echoing forest,
She sings of flowery plain,
And how she, in longing and sorrow,
There under must ever remain.

“She sings of days in childhood,
Of joyous, lovely May,
How all have now departed,
How all have faded away.
It floated over the water,
And died away in the air,
That song of a joy departed,
That sorrowful song of despair.”

“You are an ideal accompanist,” he said, warmly, when the last echoes of the music had died away ; “my voice has never been so well sustained.”

“You men are all flatterers ; I heard you say to Mrs. Nordlander that she accompanies you better than anyone you know.”

“Ah, but then I had not been accompanied by you,” he replied quickly.

"And you will not care for my music when you meet one who will accompany you far better, my harpist, who plays as David might."

"I shall be glad to meet her," he answered, "but I shall never undervalue your playing, or the kindness you have shown me this evening. What a charming house you have!" he added in a lighter tone, as he followed his hostess into the adjoining dining-room, where a tempting supper was prepared. "How well these mahogany doors and high wainscotings accord with your handsome old sideboard!"

"A family relic, like those claw-footed chairs, that lady and gentleman in brocade and powder over the mantlepiece, and this substantial table, where Jimmie has left his Welsh rarebit to our own serving," she said, as she motioned him to a seat opposite her.

"All the more cosy," he replied. "Shall I help you?" suiting the action to the word.

"Yes, my house is comfortable," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, glancing about her as she raised her glass and bowed to her guest. "I planned it myself with the aid of the clever woman artist who painted my windows. You must examine by daylight the one on the landing in the hall, the idea is rather original and the execution excellent. I think it a good picture for matrimony; I always point it out to my marriageable friends. It represents two figures

descending a staircase, hand in hand, and twined above them wreathed in flowers are the words of the Italian proverb, "Chi va piano, va sano; chi va sano, va lontano."

"It is, like all the rest of your ideas, most beautiful," he replied. "Goethe says, 'Architecture is frozen music,' but there is nothing frozen in this house, music is floating in the air, harmony everywhere," and his eyes roved with artistic satisfaction over the room.

"I notice," he said, "that none of your chairs have those dreadful tidies hanging over them. How uncomfortable those bits of 'cruel' work—well named—make one, slipping about as they always do, and pulling one's hair, and scratching the back of one's coat!"

"To give you another bad pun for yours," she said, laughingly, "you will find my chairs very 'untidy.' I think it a reproach to the heads of visitors to thus protect one's furniture. Crochet rags hanging about everywhere in a room certainly look very ugly and inartistic. I like needlework, in its place but not too much of it. I often think of what an old gentleman once told me of his visit to a newly married son. He was put into a guest room embroidered in every direction. When he washed his face, an embroidered child being washed by a, needle-worked woman looked down upon his basin, and emphasizing the picture in red let-

ters, was the injunction : ' Wash and be clean.' He said he never felt more insulted in his life. He took up a towel to dry his face, and it came in contact with a whole garden of embossed floss flowers. He wished to lie down, and found the bed—there was no sofa in the room—covered with a sort of fishing net, with bands of red ribbon between the lace. The pillows had, in great flowered letters, ' Sleep and take your rest,' a mockery, when there was no smooth spot on which to lay his head. He rang the bell violently and his daughter-in-law, fearing he had been taken suddenly ill, rushed to him in alarm.

" ' Shall I take off the shams,' she said. ' Shams,' he replied, ' it 's all sham ; I hate shams ; I 'll go back to my own house, where I can get good plain towels with which to dry my face, and not be told in needlework to wash it. '

" He said he did not wonder his son's wife was such a sickly-looking woman, always sending for the doctor. How could she be anything else, caving in her chest and putting out her eyes making those unnatural needlework flowers ; she had much better cultivate real ones and take plenty of good healthy exercise. He told me, when he returned home he sent her a handsome Marseilles quilt, and begged her to put it in place of the forlorn, stringy thing he had found on his bed in her house."

Herbert Gray laughed heartily at the story.

Then as the tall clock chimed the hour of midnight, he exclaimed, rising: "So late! how the evening has flown!" As he pressed his hostess' hand, he asked, "May I count upon you to accompany me on Monday? May I call for you at four o'clock?"

When he was gone, Mrs. Leigh-Scott returned to the library and turned the light full upon a picture which hung over her desk, a picture of a young girl in Empire dress, seated at a harp. She looked at it scrutinizingly for some moments.

"'Dark locks, a musician's brow, liquid blue eyes full of music.' Stella was educated at that convent, and she has often spoken to me of her friend and classmate, 'Sister Dimples.' How strange if mine should be the hand chosen by destiny to bring together these two kindred hearts! How I wish that woman had never crossed his path!"

CHAPTER IV.

"HAVE you got any little girls?" asked Mildred of Maurice Scott, as she looked up into his face in the library at H Street.

She was waiting impatiently for Mrs. Leigh-Scott, who had not yet returned from the charitable bazar, where she had had charge of a table. Mildred, who had at first been delighted with the idea of helping to sell, had grown tired, and, armed with a doll almost as large as herself, had been sent under the care of Sarah Burke to await the advent of her hostess, and promised griddle cakes with maple syrup. Tired of her doll, in the dearth of amusement, she had turned to the only possible source within her reach, although the abstracted, "How d'ye do, dear?" on her entrance, from one who she had felt, with the instinct of childish divination, did not very much care how she did, had not carried a great deal of encouragement with it.

"Eh, what?" he asked, putting down his newspaper and looking with a sudden interest, born of curiosity, at the bit of humanity standing by his arm-chair. She was not much in

his line, this · strangely wise-beyond-her-years child, whose great hazel eyes, fringed by long dark lashes, like her eyebrows in contrast to her red gold hair, were fixed upon him, while her full lips, matching in color the roses in her cheeks, were parted with expectancy.

"Have you got any little girls?" she repeated, in the distinct, decided tone of a child accustomed to be listened to.

"No," he answered, amused at the fixed manner in which she still regarded him.

"If you had any do you think you could tell them any stories?" she continued, gravely.

"Should you like me to make believe that you are my little girl, and tell you a story?" he asked, making a motion as if to place her on his knee. He thought he was getting on famously, totally unused to children as he was, and not particularly fond of them.

But she eluded his arm, and placing herself in a chair by his side, she said: "No, I don't want to make believe that I am your little girl, I don't like make believes, and beside, I have one papa and Grandpa Judge, that is enough. But you can tell me a story if you like," and she crossed her hands in her lap and assumed an attitude of attention.

He ransacked his memory for stories of his childhood days, and finally selected Robin Hood as about the right one to interest his

auditor. But she interrupted him at the first sentence.

"I know all about Robin Hood and his Merry Men, I knew it when I was a little girl, only five. Don't you know any others? Make up one."

"I thought you did n't like make-believes?"

"I don't like them in fathers," she said, "but in stories it's different. Grandpapa Judge tells splendid ones; he tells me about things he has seen and places where he has been, and so does papa. Tell me about those, if you can't make up," and again she prepared to listen.

He did his best to interest her, but the style which suited his constituents failed with the young critical mind. Her eyes wandered about, she moved restlessly in her chair, and suddenly hearing the sound of carriage wheels, she ran out of the room, quite indifferent whether the Indians disposed in their own way of Captain John Smith or not, and without waiting for Pocahontas to be brought upon the scene.

When the door was opened, Mildred, who had accompanied Jimmie to answer the ring, stood dumb with astonishment. She saw to her surprise a young lady, not very much taller than herself, run lightly up the steps with the air of one quite at home. She heard Jimmie say: "How d'ye do, Miss," in most welcome

accents, showing his white teeth as he spoke. "Glad to see you back ; Misses did n't 'spect yo' so soon."

"No, Jimmie, I know it, but I was home-sick and could n't stay a day longer," answered the fresh young voice, which attracted Mildred, although she felt the embarrassment of a child with a perfect stranger, and she stood silently looking now at Jimmie's delighted face, now at that of the new arrival.

Stella, not perceiving the child, was paying the hackman, when Maurice Scott, hearing her voice, came out of the library.

"Why, Miss David, is that you ? I'm very glad to see you back."

"And I'm very glad to be back, Mr. Scott," said Stella, shaking hands with him. "Where is Mrs. Leigh-Scott ?" she asked ; then her eyes fell upon Mildred, who had watched with interest all the movements of this, to her, mysterious being.

"Who is this little dear ?" she asked, and the arm she put around Mildred was not rejected as Maurice's had been, the little lips instinctively came in contact with those which sought hers.

This introduction once effected, Mildred, with all the importance the knowledge inspired, hastened to tell that Mrs. Leigh-Scott had been detained at the fair, getting everything straightened out, but that she would be

back soon and then they would have griddle cakes.

"I'm glad to hear of it, for I am very hungry," said Stella. "We breakfasted early to take the first train, and when we arrived at the station," she continued, addressing herself to Maurice, "the train was not on time and we were obliged to wait an hour."

"It must have been very tedious," said he; "my experience is that trains are never on time."

"No, it was not tedious," said Stella, "for we had a jolly party. The Countess chaperoned six girls, and there were as many men, who all went to Annapolis for the hop at the Navy Yard last night. I danced until four o'clock in the morning."

"You must be very tired," said Maurice, and Mildred crept nearer to Stella, feeling far more interested in the conversation than she had been in Mr. Scott's stories.

"I am not so very tired," said the new arrival, taking off hat and veil, while Maurice Scott gallantly offered his assistance to remove her wraps. "I love dancing better than almost anything," said Stella, dropping into a chair, "and I had some splendid partners in the mid-dies and officers, they quite cut out the civilians we took with us. Then, while we were waiting for the train, the Countess entertained us all with accounts of her life in Hungary. She is a

fascinating woman, with such a sweet voice and clear enunciation. Her coloring, too, is all her own.

"Rare indeed, replied the country member; Some faces one sees in society are like macadamized roads,—the pores have been so long filled up with powder and rouge that they have become hardened."

"The Countess' face," said Stella, "is as fresh as Mildred's—that is your name, is it not, dear? Mrs. Leigh-Scott has written me so much about you that I feel quite like an old friend," and she lifted the mass of curls and kissed the blue-veined forehead.

"Why does he call you David?" asked Mildred, who was impatient to be noticed; "you are not a boy."

"That is Mrs. Leigh-Scott's name for me. Shall I tell you a story, Mildred?"

"Yes, do—he tried but he could n't tell any one bit interesting—it's a good thing he has n't any little girls, he could n't amuse them." Stella and Maurice both laughed, and the latter said, "How do you know my stories ain't interesting? You did not stop to hear them."

"You should n't say 'ain't,'" retorted the child. "My papa never lets me say it. It isn't a nice word; you ought to know better, you're so big."

"Oh, Mildred!" began Stella.

"Your father is right," replied Maurice, good-naturedly. "No, Mildred, I ought not to say it; I do know better. The fact is," he continued, turning to Stella, "one gets into a careless way of talking in the country and it is hard to break one's self."

"Now, please begin the story," interrupted Mildred. But just at this moment the door opened, and with a shout of delight the child sprang forward into her father's arms.

"Everybody was extremely kind to me," said Miss Fontaine, after she had bowed in response to her hostess' introduction of Mr. Gray, and Mrs. Leigh-Scott had expressed surprise that she had shortened her stay. "You said nothing in your last letter of coming back so soon."

"I wished to surprise you; are you sorry to get me back like a bad penny?"

"You know better, my child; you know I missed you more than I dared say, for fear of interfering with your pleasure. You know the house is always lonely without my David."

"She wants some griddle cakes, she's hungry," said Mildred.

"A word for Miss David and two for yourself, you little diplomatist," said Maurice Scott.

"But she did say she was hungry," persisted the child.

"You must excuse my spoilt baby, Miss

Fontaine," said Herbert Gray, when they were all seated at the lunch table; "she is getting to be such an *enfant terrible*, I shall be obliged to send her to boarding-school."

"What is an *enfant terrible*?" asked Mildred, her mouth full of cakes.

And Stella said: "Why not send Mildred to the Academy of the Holy Cross here in Washington, Mr. Gray? She would grow very fond of the Sisters, and they of her. I went to school with one of them, Sister Lucia, she is called now, but I always called her Dimples."

"Sister Lucia!" he exclaimed. "Then," and he looked at her fixedly, "you must be the little girl whom my dear little Dimples introduced to me at the Convent of the Holy Cross, in Indiana. Only think, Mildred," he said, "I knew Miss Fontaine when she was only a few years older than you are now, and she played the harp then."

"She is n't very big now," said Mildred, examining Stella with a critical eye.

"Big enough to do a great deal of mischief," said Maurice.

"If she's David, you must be Goliath, you are such a big man. Did she ever hit you?—David hit Goliath."

"She hit me very hard," he began in a sentimental tone, at which everybody laughed, and Stella hastened to retort:

"Oh, Mr. Scott, that is all very well for you to say, but you could not have been very hard hit to recover so quickly! I have been gone only three weeks, and you have had two desperate flirtations in that time, I hear."

"Two?" echoed his cousin's wife; "two or three, you should say; between his duties in Congress, Maurice gives all his time to the fair sex."

"Perhaps you plead all the more eloquently, Scott, for an increase of Mrs. Harding's pension, because you are quite convinced in your own mind that she will not long apply for it," said Herbert Gray. "You know," he said, addressing himself to his hostess, "that each applicant for a widow's pension is obliged, in order to secure its continuance, to make affidavit, every three months, that she has not remarried."

"Mrs. Harding is part of my constituency," replied Maurice Scott; "she lives in Clearbrook, my village, and came to Washington to consult me about getting an increase of her pension. She wants to send her daughter, a very bright girl, to Vassar, and cannot afford to do so unless she gets more money, which she ought to have, as Ed. Harding, her husband, was a very gallant fellow and fought nobly in the war. Abby Manvers, as she was before she married, was a very pretty girl; I came near making up

to her myself, but Harding, who was a handsome fellow from a neighboring village, met her at a chicken sociable and that settled the matter with both."

"What is a chicken sociable?" asked Stella.

"Just what I was going to ask," said Herbert Gray.

"It is a church entertainment," replied the country member. "Clearbrook has six hundred inhabitants and three churches, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist, and the ladies of each are continually getting up coffee, ice cream, and chicken sociables, to raise money to pay the expenses of their respective houses of worship."

"And these sociables lead to matrimony, I suppose?" inquired Mrs. Leigh-Scott.

"Very often," he replied.

"Well, I have hopes of you, if you attend them all, and don't get ensnared by any female wiles before you return, you may make up to Mrs. Harding at a chicken sociable, especially if you once thought of doing so. I like her looks very much, and feel sure she would make you a good, sensible wife; my advice to you is, keep to your constituency."

"Did I not see you at the concert last evening with the dark-eyed brunette, Mrs. Fanning?" asked Herbert Gray. "She is not one of your constituents, for she comes from New Orleans, if I am not mistaken."

"Oh, Maurice Scott, what have you to say to that?" remarked his cousin's wife; "you are not a musical enthusiast, as Stella and I can both vouch for, and it must have been a stronger power than the music to take you there. Don't blush so; I declare you have almost as much color as Mrs. Fanning herself."

"You don't think she rouges?" he said, at which all laughed.

"Think, my dear fellow," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, "it is not a subject for thought, but for observation. Mrs. Fanning not only rouges, but does it very badly; you should quote to her an adaptation of the poet:

" 'Lest man should deem thy cheek untrue,
Keep probability in view.' "

"How hard women are upon women!"

"Not so hard as they sometimes are upon themselves, when they make up so evidently that none but a blind man could be deceived. You must have left your glasses at home last evening, Maurice."

"I never use any," he retorted; "my sight is excellent."

"Not if you cannot see what everyone else sees. I recommend you to get a powerful *lorgnette* before you escort Mrs. Rouge et Noir Fanning to another concert."

"Don't you think her very handsome?" he asked, turning to Stella.

"Was it she you pointed out to me at the last White House reception? I think you said she had had a 'sad experience.' That is the term here for divorce, is it not?"

"It was not her fault that she had such a brute for her husband that she could not live with him. If you had one who ill-treated you would you not leave him?"

"Separate from him, yes, but my religion does not permit divorce," she replied.

Involuntarily Mrs. Leigh-Scott glanced at one of her guests, but his face was bent over Mildred as he divested her of the napkin which had protected her dress from drops of maple syrup.

"What a dear little girl Mildred is, so bright and pretty and affectionate!" said Stella, as she sat with her hostess in the cosy library that evening after she had answered numerous questions respecting her visit to Annapolis.

A long silence ensued, during which Stella's mind was on the subject of Herbert Gray and his child.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott in response to the above remark, "she is all that, but she is sadly spoilt. She needs discipline and she gets none. A man is not fit to bring up a child; he should send her to his sister."

"Has her mother been long dead?"

"I believe Mildred was a mere baby when she lost her," was the reply.

“And her father has been obliged to be both parents to her, no wonder he idolizes her!” said Stella, and then she fell to picturing to herself what the woman who had won this attractive man’s heart must have been like, while the thought of the poor little motherless one and pity for the short romance so sadly ended as she supposed with the advent of this young life, gave a deeper interest to both father and child.

CHAPTER V.

THE bright sun of really spring days shone full on the parks and gardens of the beautiful city, and with the opening buds and varied hues on grass and tree and flower, fair April sky with fleecy clouds floating like angel's pillows on the tender blue, came thoughts of love to many a youthful life and hope from the universal joyousness of nature. Some rays of this spring sunshine even penetrated Maurice Scott's practical bosom and caused the few seeds of sentiment which had long lain dormant there, choked by the pebbles of law and politics, to sprout with fresh vigor and to blossom into flourishing flowers of speech which were smilingly and blushingly welcomed to the genial soil of the heart of his fair constituent.

She was a pretty, refined-looking woman, with a fund of common-sense,—what the country people call “a real smart woman,” her great ambition evidently lying in the house-keeping line. She was self-reliant, yet not in the least self-assertive, gentle and feminine in speech and manner. Mrs. Leigh-Scott's quick eyes read the whole personality and life history of Mau-

rice's prospective bride as she conversed with her,—a prolific subject being the conflict between employer and employed, the great difficulty of securing "good help," especially in the country, where the "hired girl" insists upon being treated like a friend, and eating with the family.

"I find it so hard to get good 'help,' said Mrs. Harding, "that I do my own work; I only put out my washing. Girls are too independent—they prefer factories or nurseries—I mean," she said, blushing and smiling, "seed-houses. There are several seed-houses in our part of the country. Girls get higher pay there, and they say they have more time to themselves. After all," she added, "there is not a great deal of work to do in my house. I live all alone, except when Bessie, my daughter, comes home for the holidays. She has been at school in Albany for the past year; it's very lonely without her," she added, with a sigh, "but I feel it my duty to do all I can for Bessie. She's fond of study, and she is all I have."

"Not all the interest you will have soon, I hope," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, archly, whereat her companion blushed.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott pictured to herself the monotonous existence of this woman who evidently had a yearning for the more ideal side of life, and she drew out, with her sympathetic

interest, the simple story of her early love for the lively, reckless, and extravagant young fellow, as the clever reader of human nature easily guessed him to have been, although the loyal wife little suspected that in her narrative of their married life she had allowed these facts to appear, perhaps had not herself even fully realized the true characteristics of the husband for whom she had worked early and late, while he led a shiftless easy-going existence, now making considerable sums of money from the horses he raised for the market on his stock farm, now spending it at fairs or races, his temper and his demonstrations of conjugal affection varying with his luck. He had returned from the war, with one arm and a delicate lung, a blond Othello, to win the romantic school-girl whose devoted care lengthened his brief term of life.

As Maurice had said, Harding had fought nobly, and he left a brighter record on his name as a soldier than he had in other respects. He left a life-insurance policy and a farm, which was sold for little more than to cover the mortgage, also a claim to a pension, and a little girl three years of age. With these, living in the old-fashioned homestead which she had inherited, Mrs. Harding faced life and won the respect and esteem of her neighbors by the way she sustained the struggle.

She had borne it cheerfully and bravely for her daughter's sake, and the girl repaid maternal care in filial affection.

"But how she must have longed for the love and sympathy of a true husband all these years!" thought the woman who knew from her own experience how much the heart suffers from the lack of them.

"I am so glad Maurice will have good bread to eat," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott; "he tells me that you are an excellent cook, and make the best custards he ever ate. A good custard is a very good thing, and a bad one very poor. Maurice tells me, too, that you raise all your own vegetables, that you have splendid potatoes. How do you do all this alone?"

She blushed with pleasure at Maurice's praise vicariously bestowed, and said that she enjoyed working in her garden, that she sometimes got Joe Hilt to help her; he was a Grand Army man, who worked reasonably, out of regard for her husband, in whose regiment he had served. "I cannot imagine," she said, "how persons can live without flowers around them; I take so much pleasure in my flower-beds. I often tell Mr. Scott," she added, "that he ought to keep the Manor grounds in better order. It is a shame that beautiful old place should be so run down."

She spoke of the Manor with conscious

pride that its owner, the great man of the village, was her affianced husband.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott often wished, for the sake of the future bride's sensitive feelings, that the Hon. candidate for matrimony would be a little less open in his courting, and not indulge before others in those caresses which owe their charm to the seclusion in which they are usually bestowed. She suffered occasionally for the delicate little woman, when she saw the color mount to her cheek, upon which he would impress a kiss in the most matter-of-fact manner, as though to set the seal upon his compact, for the country member having once made up his mind matrimonially, and having selected his partner, looked upon the affair in a practical manner, and considered a certain amount of demonstration before marriage and before others as an honest declaration of his intentions and part of the business of getting married.

"Don't let him have his own way too much," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, when she heard him planning his future life rather than consulting his betrothed; "make him mount your establishment properly; don't make a drudge of yourself; you can get good servants—not 'help,' I hate that word—if you pay for them, and Maurice can perfectly well afford it; make him spend his money. And pray, don't let him

keep you all the year 'round in the country ; persuade him to bring you here for the winter, take you to New York or some other city. Travel and change broaden the mind. See, how much Maurice has improved by his winter in Washington ; don't let him slip back into his careless ways."

"I wonder, Constance," said Maurice, as he sat one morning with Mrs. Leigh-Scott waiting until it should be late enough for him to make his appearance at the house of the friend whom Mrs. Harding was visiting, "I wonder you do not marry again ; such an attractive woman as you are ought to make some good man happy, and let him make you so," and his face beamed complacently, as through the smoke of his cigar he beheld the vision of domestic bliss awaiting him with a sweet-tempered common-sense wife, and children in the background.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott did not answer immediately, she was filing some bills at her desk when he spoke ; as she turned her face towards him, he was startled at its pallor and stern expression.

"Never dare again to say such a thing to me, Maurice," she said, in a voice trembling with emotion at this sudden intrusion upon her most sacred feelings. As he watched her bite her lip, and saw the tears start to her eyes, he stammered something about not wishing to

offend her. He had never seen her off her balance before, this usually self-contained woman. He had not meant to distress her by his speech. Women were joked every day upon this subject ; it was a compliment to their charms.

"I know," she said, "you do not understand, you cannot ; but please never speak on the subject to me again, I cannot bear it." Then she made a strong effort to master herself, and turning towards him with a forced smile, she said : "And what are you going to 'do' to-day ; is it the Washington Monument, or the Treasury ?"

"We are going to the monument, and I must be off," and he started to his feet. "I told Abby I should call for her at eleven. This is a good day for the monument."

"Poor Abby !" said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, "don't make her walk up all those steps."

"Oh, she is strong and accustomed to exercise ; she is delighted with Washington, and I want her to see everything while she is here, she may never have another chance. There is no telling what may happen."

"Is not that rather a lugubrious way of talking for a bridegroom ?" asked Mrs. Leigh-Scott. "Well, I hope, you will enjoy the monument together. Bring Mrs. Harding back to luncheon."

Her interest in the sunflower courtship expanding before her eyes had turned Mrs. Leigh-Scott's attention from the less obvious passion which was secretly but steadily progressing in her white-and-gold drawing-room, where music was the daily food of a love so gradual and so unobtrusive, as to be unsuspected even by one who listened with keen enjoyment to the combined harmony of player and singer. This looker-on saw only two musicians intent upon perfecting themselves in the parts assigned them by the managers of the concert, to be given for the sake of sweet charity, Stella having been asked to play a harp accompaniment to Herbert's song, and she being unfamiliar with the music, they required a great deal of practice, so every spare moment they could find they gave to rehearsals. Sometimes Mildred was allowed to be present, and she would stand perfectly quiet by the side of the instrument, her eyes following with rapt attention the motion of the small hands as they flew across the strings, or she would sit curled up in a huge arm-chair, watching the expression of the harpist's face, and glancing from time to time at her father's, her rosy lips parted, as if drinking in the music she so loved. Sometimes Mrs. Leigh-Scott would bring in Mrs. Harding, who had music in her soul, and to whom the melody of the harp was a rare treat, as was

such a voice as Herbert Gray's. Maurice Scott, who no longer made any pretence of caring for music, even for the sake of politeness, which, as he now frankly admitted, was the only reason why he ever pretended to listen to Miss David, although he did not doubt her music was of a superlative quality, in his position as an almost married man, and to be excused from paying attention to any but his future wife, generally betook himself to the library or the conservatory, and smoked or read the papers very patiently while waiting for his betrothed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE gay season interrupted by Lent recommenced with fresh vigor after Easter. Stella entered into the gayeties with a zest which quite satisfied the friend, who was glad to see the social triumphs of her "David."

"You have not put all your poetry into the charming verses I read in *The Post* this morning, Miss Fontaine," said Paul Mortimer, the best dancer in Washington, as he stood fanning his partner after a waltz they had enjoyed.

"How shall I thank you for such a compliment?" asked Stella, smiling.

"Materialize a thought for me to carry away," replied the young man, whose acquaintances chaffed him on account of his interest in spiritualism, which he declared he was only investigating.

The fairy poetess took the card and pencil he handed her and wrote the following:

"Call back no shadowy visions from the past,
I am content to have the present last."

"I wish I could believe you really mean that last line," he said.

"Indeed I do," she continued. "Compliment

for compliment. If, as you say, we have each our spiritual control to guide our earthly actions, some once famous *danseur*, or perhaps," she said archly, "some *danseuse* may be looking at you from the other world and directing your steps ; or, do you have private dancing lessons, Mr. Mortimer, from a materialized spirit, introduced by the medium of whom you spoke to Mrs. Leigh-Scott?"

"Laugh at spiritualism, Miss Fontaine, if you like," said Mortimer, "but I think I could show you some things that would convince even such unbelievers as you and Mrs. Leigh-Scott, that there is more in the creed than you think. Unfortunately I am ordered from Washington by my earthly control and must leave for California in a week."

"How lucky for other fellows," said Herbert Gray, who, coming up at this moment, had overheard the journalist's words. "You quite monopolize Miss Fontaine, Mortimer ; when you are gone some one else may have a chance. Will you give me this dance?" he asked, turning to Stella, and the next moment they were floating off together in a waltz which neither of them ever forgot. To them had come the supreme moment which comes but once in a lifetime, which only comes to those whose earnest natures make such a moment possible. The moment when, though honor and will may

seal the lips, the heart must speak its secret to the heart it loves, speak it through the tell-tale windows of the eyes which cannot, will not hide the truth. And yet preachers tell us we are all that contradictory term "free agents!"

Some hours later, Paul Mortimer, tilting his chair in the journalistic den to which he had returned in no very amiable mood after Miss Fontaine had left him for another partner, struggled hard to catch up with time and the train of scientific thought he had abandoned for the ball-room. The article must be finished by a certain time, but the ideas he wanted would not come; try as he might to find them, his thoughts reverted to the handsome pair whose mutual love he had seen reflected in their eyes. He envied Herbert Gray, with plenty of time and money at his disposition, free to love and marry where and when he chose. Of course, he, Mortimer, was not in love with Miss Fontaine, he was not in love with any girl, and marriage was not in his calculations, he was not a marrying man, but he liked immensely to dance and chat with this ideal partner,—this appreciative listener and clever talker. She did not share his peculiar theories of life, she often laughed at him for his "investigations," but all the same she liked to draw him out and combat his views, and he enjoyed, as she always appeared

to do, the conversational tilt. What would she care now for the mysteries of the future, for speculations with regard to another world, she, who was so happy in the present, who had found her paradise on earth? What engaged girl ever cares to talk to any other man than the one to whom she is engaged, and of course Stella Fontaine was engaged to Herbert Gray, or they were on the point of an engagement. Just then the door opened to admit the very man of whom Mortimer was thinking. "What the deuce brings him here at three o'clock in the morning?" thought the journalist, annoyed at the interruption. His annoyance, however, changed to sympathy as he greeted his unexpected visitor, who certainly did not look like a successful lover. Gray's face was ashy pale, his habitually bright eyes wore an expression of hopeless misery, and the set lips veiled by no moustache showed suppressed intense emotion. He motioned away the cigar and glass of brandy which his host hospitably offered, and dropping wearily into a chair beside the desk, he covered his eyes with his hand and sat for some moments in silence.

"Can she have refused him?" was Mortimer's mental ejaculation. His guest looking up suddenly caught the inquiring glance and colored under it, then making a desperate effort to command himself, he said hurriedly, "You

said something about going to Colorado, California, or somewhere."

"The Chief wants some information with respect to a railroad in prospect near Los Angeles, and sends me to write it up, I who know nothing about the subject," said the journalist, laughing.

"I can give you points; I am a civil engineer. How should you like me to go with you? Congress adjourned yesterday. I am free to join you at any time you say."

"Delighted to have your company, but is n't this a sudden idea on your part?"

"Sudden, yes, perhaps so," replied the other, abstractedly, "but I must get away from here. I care little where, so that I leave Washington." He spoke and looked so strangely that Mortimer, fearing he hardly knew what, grew alarmed, and taking the glass of brandy he had poured out, said: "Here, drink this, it will brace you up, you are ill and tired." "She has refused him," he muttered; "what flirts women are!"

Herbert Gray mechanically drank the brandy. It seemed to restore his calmness. In a few moments he asked in his usual tone, "Do you believe in presentiments, Mortimer? As you Spiritualists say, 'something impels me to go with you.'"

"It's your control," replied the other, emphatically.

"Well, perhaps so," said the visitor, with a sad, incredulous smile, rising as he spoke. "At any rate, I'll go with you whenever you are ready to start. "Good-night,"—and before Mortimer had time to answer him, Gray was gone.

"She has refused him, and he's awfully cut up about it. Who would have thought that Stella Fontaine was the girl to lead a man on and then to throw him over. There is no trusting a woman."

But with all his sympathy with the rejected one, the thought that Stella Fontaine was still free to dance and talk with him was not an unpleasant one, and with a relieved mind the young man applied himself with renewed effort to his task, and the article was completed in time for the next day's paper.

CHAPTER VII.

"SING *Happy Bird* for me, Stella," begged Mildred, as she clung to the harpist the next morning in the library in the household where she had become a daily visitor. Stella roused herself from her reverie—from the continual wondering since the night before, why he had left her without speaking the words which seemed trembling on his lips, yet he had parted with her those words unsaid save by his eyes. She wondered what the message brought by Mildred could mean. "Papa does not know if he will have time to practise with you to-day, Stella, he is so very busy." What business could detain him from her, and he had seemed so interested in their rehearsals for the concert which was to come off in a few days. What did it all mean?"

"Don't tease Stella, Mildred, my dear. You danced too much last night. Was Paul Mortimer there?" asked Mrs. Leigh-Scott.

"Yes," replied the girl, blushing as she thought of her other partner.

"I hope he may not convert you to spiritualism," said her hostess, mistaking the cause

of the blush. "I had a bad dream last night."

"Indeed, what was it?" asked Stella.

"I don't wonder you have bad dreams after eating Welsh rarebits before retiring," said Maurice, placing himself on the sofa beside his beloved and taking in his hand a lock of hair which had strayed from her head. "Nice hair, isn't it?" he said, looking admiringly at it—"all her own too, no sham here, no rouge on these cheeks."

"Don't, Mr. Scott," whispered the pretty blonde, moving away from her admirer and blushing violently as she fastened the recreant curl in place; "you make me ashamed."

"That is right, scold him well, he deserves it," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, smiling to herself as she recalled how the prospective bridegroom who was now calmly apprizing the personal advantages of his betrothed, had in this very room, only a short time before, weighed Stella's qualifications for the position of Mrs. Maurice Scott, and how completely he appeared to have forgotten that he had ever thought of the girl in such a connection.

"Isn't Mr. Scott a funny man?" asked Mildred in a stage whisper of Stella, as she watched with precocious curiosity the by-play of the pair, Maurice placing upon Mrs. Harding's shoulder her wrap, which office he accomplished

with sundry small endearments which she strove to suppress, but none of which were lost upon the child.

"How he does tease Mrs. Harding! Come," she continued, after Stella had shaken hands with the lovers, who took their departure, "Come, play a little on the harp just for me, and sing me one tiny song. I am sure you are not too tired for that. Aunt Constance, don't you want to hear *Tell Me, Sweet Rose?*"

Herbert Gray, who did find time to come, saw a pretty picture as he mounted the three steps and pushed aside the embroidered Cupids which curtained the door of the music room: Stella at the golden harp playing to the music of her own voice, Mrs. Leigh-Scott seated in a large arm-chair, and at her feet, on an embroidered cushion, the pretty child busily arranging, from some flowers in the lap of her light blue dress, a bouquet which she intended to throw to the singer.

Mildred sprang towards him, dropping her flowers all around, the music ceased, and Mrs. Leigh-Scott arose and looked inquiringly at the new-comer.

"I have come to claim the promise you made me, that you would prove my friend in time of need," he said—then paused abruptly and looked so troubled that Mrs. Leigh-Scott hastened to his assistance; Stella, feeling that

she might be *de trop*, had stepped into the adjoining conservatory and had drawn Mildred with her.

"Have you any clue?" He shook his head. "What can I do for you?" The same words she had used on a former occasion, but this time, as he told her, there was no question of an accompaniment, it was, on the contrary, a severing of himself from—Mildred, he quickly added, and his eye wandered as though in search of his child. His companion's quick ear had noticed his hesitation; he colored at the penetrating glance she turned upon him.

"I am going to California next week. No, I have no clue, but I must go—I must go away from here." He spoke in broken sentences.

"I wanted to ask you," said he, recovering himself, "if you would kindly take charge of Mildred for a few days until my sister arrives. She is coming to the Holy Cross Seminary here and I shall write to her to take charge of Mildred."

"I shall be very glad to take care of the child as long as you wish; let her nurse bring her. When do you go?"

"Next week."

"Mildred!" The child ran to him at the sound of her name. He sat down, drew her to him, and stroking her curls as if to give himself a countenance, as the French express it, he began:

"My dear little girl. I have some news for you." She looked up quickly and, struck by his grave expression, the tears started to her eyes, and she put up her little lips as though to cry.

"Don't, Mildred, darling, don't!" and he bent down and kissed the child; "don't make it harder for me to leave you."

As the child at these words burst into a passionate cry, the sound of a step caused him to look up, and he met Stella's startled gaze. She was standing at the conservatory door, pale as marble. She steadied herself against the door. Mrs. Leigh-Scott caught the electric glance that shot from one heart to another through his despairing eyes to hers.

"Take me with you, papa, do take me!" implored the child in accents which had his own rich sweetness in them; "I won't be any trouble, I will be so good, and Sarah Burke can come to take care of me, do take me with you!"

He smiled mournfully at her. "I am going away, Mildred, I don't know for how long." Again his eyes involuntarily sought the face upon which they lingered lovingly, while his arms tightened around Mildred's neck as the child nestled sobbing in his arms.

"Be a brave little girl," he said in husky tones; "good, kind Mrs. Leigh-Scott will take care of you until your aunt comes."

"I don't want you to leave me," she cried, stamping her little foot. "I don't want any aunt but Aunt Constance. Let me stay here until you come back. Can't I stay, Aunt Constance, with you and Stella?"

"I am going away too, Mildred, darling," said the girl, in strange, unnatural tones. Herbert Gray, who had turned away to hide his emotion, repeated in an absent manner, "Going away?"

"Yes," she said, coming forward and moving wearily towards a chair, "Papa is coming for me; he will take me home when—when the concert is over." The last word was scarcely audible as she dropped in a dead faint. He sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

"Stella! darling, speak to me."

But Mrs. Leigh-Scott coldly motioned him away. "Go!" she said, "take Mildred home, leave her to me!" and she chafed the girl's wrist and pushed her chair towards the window, of which she quickly raised the sash.

Stella slowly opened her eyes as Herbert Gray, taking the hand of his child, with one parting look of unutterable anguish, left the room.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott to herself, "it is better she should know the truth. Poor child! And he, poor fellow, would to God that they had never met!" and so with Stella nestling like a

weary bird against her breast, her kind friend told her Herbert Gray's story.

"My poor darling, and you love him!" No answer, but the sad pathetic eyes spoke for her.

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"Katie," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott the next morning, as the neatly gowned and capped young woman brought the coffee and rolls to the rose-decorated boudoir opening out of Mrs. Leigh-Scott's dressing-room, in which she and her young visitor were accustomed to take this first breakfast in all that luxurious ease of *peignoir* conducive to pleasant familiar feminine chat,— "Katie, you must not call Miss Stella, she was tired when she went to bed, let her have a good long sleep this morning."

"Shure Miss Stella's down and playing the harp these two hours, mum, and she looks for all the world a pictur of the Blessed Vargin in her blue wrapper with thim angel sleeves and her great blue eyes too big for her purty little face," said Katie, who like the rest of the household had an intense admiration for Stella, and who often stood at the music-room door, broom or dusting-brush in hand, listening with delight to the harp music.

"Stella darling, Katie tells me you have been practising two hours."

"Yes," she replied sadly, without looking up;

"I could not sleep, I had to do something. I must do something, quiet is intolerable. Beside I must practise, I have only two days before the concert."

"Are you sure you are able, strong enough?" began Mrs. Leigh-Scott, and then paused, struck by the forced calm of the girl's manner.

"Quite sure, I shall be able to play."

"Stella, you are over-taxing yourself, you can never go through that accompaniment, you had better give it up."

"Never!" she replied, with emphasis, "I must, I will play it; I must face my life," she added wearily. "Papa, too, is coming," and she held out an open letter for her hostess to read; "he is coming to take me home, and, he expects to hear me play at the concert; I cannot disappoint him."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE evening of the concert arrived, and all Washington, all of its four hundred, with some drops of milk mingling with the "cream," in its best clothes, was gathered to listen to what promised from the programme to be the greatest treat of the season.

The stage had been converted into a garden of rare plants and flowers, and no expense or pains had been spared to make the setting worthy of the string of musical gems expected.

When the first fair musician had received the floral tribute to the excellence of the performance, time was allowed the audience to discuss the merits of the singer, and to take breath before being called upon to enjoy the violin performance of a musical prodigy, the daughter of an Admiral in the Navy. When this choice morsel had been applauded, a member of one of the foreign legations sang a German song with a social leader, which was enthusiastically encored.

Then dress-coats circulated among "cut-out bodies," as a foreign lady who was rapidly learning English called the corsages of the

fashionably dressed women, and the lull of music gave place to the hum of conversation, which perhaps three fourths of the audience enjoyed quite as well as the other portion of the evening's entertainment.

"How pale she is, white as her dress, she is frightened, and how delicate she looks! That is Miss Fontaine, staying with Mrs. Leigh-Scott. She plays wonderfully, almost like a professional." Such were some of the remarks which were made as the closing part of the programme brought the time for the harp recital, the *Song without Words*, which was to be Stella's performance. She moved towards the beautiful golden harp which had been garlanded for the occasion, and as she stood beside it, her face colorless as her ivory-white Empire gown, a portion of the green wreath, escaping from its fetters wound itself in her dark hair.

"She is frightened," some one had said, but there was no want of power in the way in which the skilful fingers flew across the strings, no fear in the calm white face, though the compressed lips told of suppressed emotion to the only two who knew the turmoil in the harpist's bosom. Not for the audience she cared, she saw no one there, as she played with perfect execution the plaintive melody which suddenly culminated in a crash—"Broken a string" some one said; calmly she paused to renew the

broken chord, then again with new force, new pathos, the instrument gave forth, under the bidding of the artist's fingers, its perfect melody.

There was a sigh of intense satisfaction, of relieved pent-up feeling, as the last sound died away, and the musician came forward gracefully acknowledging the bouquets which were showered upon her. The burst of applause fell unheeded upon her ear, she stood for a moment apparently lost in thought, and it was only when, raising her eyes, she caught Mildred's excited glance and heard the child call, "Stella," as she stood up between Grandpa Judge and Mrs. Chester in the front row of the audience, that the harpist was sufficiently recalled to herself to bow and smile in answer to the repeated cheers. In vain the encore, in vain the renewed applause,—Stella bowed and retired, and at last finding their efforts unavailing, the audience was obliged to renounce the pleasure of a repetition of the harp recital.

After a quartette of professional talent, Stella again came forward, Herbert Gray at her side, his Father Damien face white as marble.

"How handsome he is! What a splendid face!" whispered more than one among the audience.

Well had Mrs. Leigh-Scott said, "the anguish of the singer makes the sweetness of the strain."

There was scarcely a dry eye in the audience, as that exquisite voice in waves of melody floated on the air, with such depths of pathos, such intensity of feeling that it reached even the coldest heart in the theatre.

"It is like the *Miserere* sung in the Sistine Chapel," whispered one husky voice as the owner of it dried her weeping eyes. "Listen! Is it not just like the *Tenebræ* when the last light goes out?" and "How faultlessly the harp accords with the voice!" said another.

They little knew of the *tenebræ* in the hearts of singer and player; they little guessed; those gay society people who wept over the fictitious sorrows of the hero and heroine in their favorite novel, who enjoyed the luxury of feeling the "ball in the throat," as a contrast to the "laughing ready to kill oneself" over a farce. They little guessed the life-drama which had been played by those two whose singing and playing was the uttered anguish of their souls.

It was over—that ordeal which their friend's sympathetic heart had dreaded for the two, for whose misery she grieved all the more because powerless to help them. They had bowed and smiled and done their parts in the great masquerade of life. Mr. Fontaine looked anxiously at his daughter as he hurried to her side, and gave his hearty praise of the performance, noticing the pallor of her face, the weary

look in her eyes, but he ascribed them to over-fatigue, the result of constant practice and also of late hours.

"I must take you home, my child," he said: "you have lost all the roses from your cheek, with too much dissipation."

"Yes, let us go home, papa," she said wearily; "I am ready."

One stolen glance at the face of the singer, a single farewell clasp of the hand. Only one friend standing near divined that the heart of each lay in that pressure. To them it was a parting perhaps forever, leaving for their sad consolation, impressed upon the mental mirror of each heart, the well-beloved features, while the faithful phonograph of memory should repeat to them through time and space, and circumstance and fate, the song of love breathed into it by the anguish of their souls.

CHAPTER IX.

THE travellers from Washington took the Southern Pacific route, stopping for a couple of days in New Orleans, as Mortimer wished to see the races which were then going on there. To Gray it was immaterial when and where they went, the essential with him being to get away from Washington and from his own thoughts; the paramount one, that his presence had brought misery to another as well as to himself.

"I wish I could afford to double the amount," said Mortimer, referring to his bet on the horse he felt sure would win the handicap.

The two men were seated at a table in the restaurant, where the *cuisine* is so appetizing that the indifferent service is overlooked.

"It's worth double the money to take the interest you do in the horse,"—here Gray interrupted himself to rise and bow to the handsome military-looking man with beautiful white hair, imperial, and moustache, who with another gentleman escorted two ladies. One of them made a motion towards a large table unoccupied save at the extreme end, where two women were seated in confidential talk. But the General

laid his hand upon her arm, spoke a few words in French to the head waiter, and the party moved towards a staircase which led to a private dining-room. The General lingered behind to speak to Gray, and when the latter had introduced him to his companion, in courteous manner and in that attractive Creole accent which so charms the Northern ear accustomed to strident energetic utterance, the strangers were given *rendez vous* at the Club for a few hours later.

"What charming manners Southerners have, and how jolly it would be to stay here a month," said Mortimer, the day following a delightful evening spent with the General and some of New Orleans' "best men" to whom he and Gray had been introduced. The Ward McAllister of the Crescent City had invited them to a picnic to be given a week later at a country place belonging to the Club; six members were to pay all the expenses of this choice exclusive entertainment. "Where duty calls we must obey," sighed Mortimer; "but I should like to dance with a fascinating Creole at that picnic."

The clear-cut lips of the other man wreathed in a bitter smile as he thought how one pretty girl was the same as another to the light-hearted investigator of the occult. "It's fortunate that you knew the General, Gray," continued Mortimer, "or we might still be in the beastly accommodations in which he found us," and

the young man looked appreciatingly around the large airy room opening upon a balcony and communicating with a similar apartment, both furnished with four-posted bedstead, generous bureau with brass handles, and huge clothespress, etc., all in solid mahogany of the style in vogue in the days of "auld lang syne."

"The General is a type of the accomplished Southern soldier and gentleman," said Gray; "he and my uncle were in the same class at West Point, they fought on opposite sides in the war, but they retained their regard for each other."

"What a foolish expenditure of blood and money that war was," remarked Mortimer, as he deposited his empty cup and saucer on the old-fashioned stand,—morning coffee and rolls went with the apartment. "If it had not been for the politicians, slavery might have been *bought* out for less than half it cost to *fight* it out; the South realized that the time had come for the freedom of their slaves, and would have agreed to take a sum approximate to their value had government proposed it, but to have their property wrested from them *nolens volens* was hard upon them and destructive to the prosperity of the whole country. It was the bumptious ones on both sides who made all the rest suffer. A lost opportunity for brilliant statesmanship."

"Very true, lost opportunities cause most of the trouble in this world. I suppose there is scarcely an individual who does not regret some fatal step in his life ; I am sure," added Gray, with a sigh, "I would give half I am worth to retrace some of mine."

"That is the comfort of the doctrine of reincarnation : in a future existence we shall have the benefit of the experience of this."

"Small comfort to the man stretched on the rack here," answered Gray, sarcastically, "to be told that in another body his limbs will be free from pain. But the unknowable future can never be other to us mortals than a mere matter of speculation, and even if I were sure of the truth of your doctrine, I have not found life so delightful as to wish to return to it in another form."

"I do not wish to pry into your affairs, Gray," said his companion, struck by the hopeless look of the man before him, an expression he had more than once remarked there during the journey they had made together, "but I cannot help seeing that you have something on your mind ; if I can help you——" He stopped abruptly as the stern lips seemed to close upon all confidence.

"Thank you," was the cold reply, "but I do not think you can help me." He rose and paced the room silently. Naturally reticent,

Gray felt doubly so with his quick-witted companion whom he feared might have guessed the secret of his love for Stella, which, though he knew it to be shared by her, was an agonizing thought, as he could not own this love. "Yes," he said, suddenly pausing in his walk and keeping his eyes on the ground, "I have something on my mind, but no one can help me. I must rely on fate and the unexpected. I know you mean kindly, Mortimer, but please do not speak of this again."

Then in a tone of forced cheerfulness he said : "I know you must find my company very dull ; perhaps when we get to business and the railroad I may be able to make myself more agreeable."

There is an unpretentious shop-window in Canal Street, New Orleans, where primers, slates, cheap paper novels, and sundries elbow each other, in the midst of which Herbert Gray spied some postage-stamps of which he stood in need. As he and his *compagnon de voyage* entered the dingy little shop, they were startled by the array of rare miscellaneous "volumes of forgotten lore" cheek by jowl with literature of the present day, and while awaiting the leisure of the proprietor of the establishment, then engaged in the sale of a book to a medical student, they turned to admire the exquisite flesh tints in a large canvas stretching the length of one side of the shop.

The Toilette of Venus was certainly in a most inappropriate boudoir. But this masterpiece of art had surroundings of gems of paintings of various sizes.

"If you care for pictures, look at that one," said the shabbily attired proprietor, who, having concluded his bargain with one customer, was now quite ready to attend to the requirements of another.

"It is indeed a wonderful animal," said Mortimer, as they stood before the true-to-nature donkey, whose head seemed to turn as though full of life. "That picture must be valuable."

"It's worth ten thousand dollars, and cheap at that," replied the owner.

"It ought to be in the Corcoran Gallery or the Metropolitan Museum," remarked Mortimer.

"I sold a fine Rembrandt to that Museum," said the man, who, though he said he was able to draw his check at any moment for twenty thousand dollars and although the possessor of the Creole Art Gallery, seemed quite content to pass his days in this dingy shop.

He piloted his visitors up the insecure stairway which threatened to give way every step they took, and which led to a dark upper story filled with boxes in which were books of all kinds. He placed the tin candlestick with its

flaming candle on the edge of one of these boxes, from which he extracted the work on theosophy the investigator of that science desired. "I have seventy thousand volumes, and I can lay my hand upon any one of them," was the reply of this singular collector in response to the wonder expressed that he could find anything in such confusion. "Oh, there is no danger," he said, shrugging his shoulders at the further remark that he might find it difficult to insure valuable goods so insecurely housed.

"Here is one of the smallest and one of the best Madonnas Murillo ever painted, it came from the sale of the property of an old Louisiana family," said the *virtuoso*, when the party had returned to the main shop, and a drawer full of treasures had been opened for the inspection of the visitors.

Mortimer took up the diminutive painting on copper and noted with interest the delicate execution of the lovely faces of mother and child, but Gray's attention was not to be diverted from a gold and enamel watch he saw in the drawer. He took it out and examined closely its every detail and his cheek paled as he recognized a trinket he had given his wife on their arrival in Paris soon after their marriage. It was a small antique affair, a watch set in a little gold and enamel basket, upon the lid a pair of

Cupids, and links of gold and enamel at each end of the basket, by which Herbert Gray remembered it had been attached to a bracelet for which his wife had also begged him.

"Where did you get this?" and as he spoke Gray pulled from his pocket a bundle of bank-notes and held the watch closely in his hands as though determined not to part with it.

"It was brought here for me to sell," was the reply, and the dealer, anticipating the inquiry, mentioned the price at which he held the trinket. Gray counted out the money with nervous haste, placed the basket-watch in his pocket, and inquired hurriedly, his eyes speaking as well as his lips, "Can you give me the address of—of the person who brought this here?"

The dealer, with a deliberation that exasperated his impatient customer, first placed the money in the drawer of his desk and then took from it a card with a flower in the corner, upon which was written Mlle. Delphine Salomon, and below, the number of the street where she was to be found.

Telling Mortimer, who had watched the scene with silent astonishment, that he would join him at their rooms in Rampart Street, Gray hailed a cab and was driven to the place indicated by the card. It was a poor little room in a cheap French hotel where Mlle. Delphine

Salomon received her visitor. She was clad in a tawdry gown, which looked the more faded from its contrast with her brilliant cheeks; she had a profusion of yellow hair, fine teeth, and a pleasant smile which vanished behind the clouds of her gray-blue eyes as they grew misty, while in her voluble vernacular she told her experience since her arrival in America with the French circus, in which she had played a minor part. The circus came to grief, when the star, Madame Montana, was thrown from her horse while riding a steeple-chase. Madame Montana was the great lady rider; she was a lady born, and had caprices as Delphine supposed most born ladies have. She was sometimes very trying in her temper, and when her maid left her, as was often the case after a violent scene, Delphine, who was the only one who could get on with Madame, was called upon to give her services in the dressing-room. It was upon one of these occasions that Madame, in an impulse of generosity, had given Delphine the *bijou* which had "procured her the pleasure and honor of a visit from Monsieur, since he had been so good as to buy the watch; she would never have parted with such a valuable gift and souvenir of Madame if she had not been left alone in a strange city and without the means of returning to La Belle France, which she ought never to have left." Here a burst

of tears relieved her pent up feelings, and her visitor had difficulty in persuading her to return to the story, which he was all impatience to hear. The day of the accident, the French girl told him, Madame, who was not quite herself—here Delphine explained that La Montana, who suffered terribly from “la névralgie,” often took large doses of opium to allay the pain, and that it made her do strange things at times. She had that morning quarrelled with the manager, and also with several members of the company, and in her passion she had struck her beautiful black mare Sultane, the mare that she had trained herself and that she loved beyond anything in the world. The animal, unaccustomed to cruel treatment from any one, least of all from her mistress, who had always petted her, blinded by the repeated blows, had missed its footing, and, striking against an obstacle in its path, had fallen with its rider.

“Was she killed?” asked Gray, who had followed the girl’s recital with breathless interest.

“Not killed, but very badly hurt ; the doctors could not say if La Montana would ever be able to ride again. Sultane would not recover. Poor Sultane ! Would Monsieur like to see her picture and Madame’s ?” As she spoke, Delphine took from her mantel a framed, colored photograph. It represented a handsome black mare

with star on its forehead and long flowing mane and tail, led by a groom in livery; standing by the animal, one gloved hand upon its sleek coat, clad in a perfectly fitting amazone, an English hat poised gracefully on the curls of red gold hair, the woman for whom Gray had so long vainly sought.

After a few moments' silent contemplation of the picture, Gray made a desperate effort to command himself, and in a tone of forced composure asked where the lady could be found. Then noting her smile of intelligence, he hastened to inform Delphine that she had been correct in her impression that Madame Montana was a lady born, who had been carried away by her love of horses to desert her family and her position in society, to follow the career of a circus rider; that her friends had long been anxious to induce her to return to them; and, he added, significantly, any assistance in finding her address would be handsomely rewarded.

Great was the distress of the voluble Delphine that she could tell Monsieur no more than that Madame had left New Orleans some weeks before without leaving any address. But she remembered that one of the clowns, when he called to say adieu, or rather *au revoir*, previous to his return to Paris, had told her that he had heard of La Ville des Anges as the probable destination of Madame.

Monsieur Jacques was such a *farceur* that she thought he was indulging in a *jeu d'esprit* at Madame's expense, which in the latter's critical condition, seemed to Delphine most unkind. Jacques had, however, insisted that Les États Unis really contained Une Ville des Anges; Delphine, from her own experience, was inclined to doubt; Monsieur, however, might know of La Ville des Anges somewhere in his country.

To Mortimer's surprise his companion's spirits appeared to rise as they journeyed for three days through the American Desert. While the investigator of the occult grumbled at the continuance of sandy plains with clumps of ugly dwarf cacti here and there, dead cattle lying along the roadside where they had wandered in quest of water, while Mortimer was bored by the monotony of the long stretch of the great sand mountains of the Sierras, Gray was interested in the strange phase of country so in contrast with the other fertile States. He discussed with his fellow-travellers, the propriety of legislature taking steps to redeem the arid lands of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, which only need irrigation to cause the soil to blossom with something better than the cactus. He looked with curious interest at the painted, coarse-haired Indian woman with papoose strapped to her back, whom he saw at a station. He dropped coins into the outstretched hands

of the Mexican children, picturesque in their rags and swarthy beauty, as they stood grouped in front of the car window when the train stopped for a few moments.

He talked miscellaneous subjects with his companion, and the latter marvelled at the change in the lately apathetic Gray. Little did the Apostle of Theosophy guess that a spring of hope was watering the long-thirsty heart of the man who was travelling towards Los Angeles, where he hoped to find a clue to the mystery he sought to unravel, a light out of darkness; where he hoped to discover the woman to whom a foolish loveless marriage had bound him, and from whom for her sake, as well as for his own, he hoped legally to break those bonds, and, once free, to be at liberty to seek the one to whom his heart was already united in the truest of marriages. For years he had been plunged in the uncertainty whether the mother of his child might not be suffering want and privation or leading a life unworthy of herself and of him, if indeed she might be living at all. All efforts to discover her had been unavailing, and he had not known where to seek her; this clue, he hoped, he had accidentally discovered took a load from his mind, and made him appear more like the Herbert Gray Mortimer had known in Washington.

Mortimer and Gray enjoyed immensely their

transition to the fertile cultivated immediate surroundings of Los Angeles, that city less than half a century old, yet already possessing luxurious homes, fine public buildings, and broad boulevards bordered by the gorgeous pink-blossomed, gracefully sweeping-boughed pepper tree, and its less handsome companion, the health-giving eucalyptus. Great hedges of calla lilies surrounded gardens everywhere, and on all sides were orange trees with the golden fruit against the smooth rich green of the leaves, and over all the blue canopy of heaven lighted up by the sun's bright rays—"Los Angeles," well had it been named.

On his arrival in the city Gray had placed his case in the hands of a detective with injunctions to spare no pains or expense to bring him the slightest intelligence wherever he might be, and having been assured that his orders would be implicitly obeyed, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of his novel surroundings. The railroad magnate, to whom Mortimer had brought a letter of introduction, was most princely in his hospitality; he took his guests to visit fine orange groves and vineyards. He showed them palatial hotels with acres of cultivated grounds attached to them; he pointed out sites for new and still grander ones. He showed them ancient landmarks of Spanish possession of the country. They visited roads

of wonderful engineering skill, and discussed projected new ones. Monterey, Del Monte, Santa Barbara, Pasadena, all came in for their admiration, and they even experienced the shock of an earthquake, which they were told was the most important that had visited that portion of the country for years.

The travellers from the North had been in California ten days or more, when one afternoon Mortimer, having finished his newspaper work, felt himself at liberty to pursue his investigations in his favorite direction, and therefore went off to visit a high-priest of Theosophy, from whom he hoped to obtain some valuable information with regard to that science; Gray meanwhile smoked his cigar in the park near his hotel. As he was pondering over the subject most in his thoughts, his attention was attracted by the conversation of two gentlemanly-looking men of a certain age who had risen from a bench near him.

"What a fool that young Fortescue is to break with his father and forfeit a couple of millions for a woman like the Montana. She must be fully ten years his senior."

"Fully," replied the other man, "and broken down in health besides, yet I hear he is so infatuated that he declares he will marry her in spite of everything. It appears her doctors have ordered her to Colorado, and he has followed her,"

"Will she marry him if his father cut him off?"

"Oh, he has a fortune from his mother."

"Excuse me," interrupted Gray, who had hurried up to the men, then just in front of him, "but you mentioned the name of a lady in whom I am interested. I know her relatives, who are much distressed by her adopting the course she has. Can you tell me where she is now? It would be a kindness to her friends," he hesitated as he felt his awkwardness in thus intruding upon the conversation of perfect strangers.

He found that the two gentlemen had only a hearsay knowledge of the devotion of young Fortescue to La Montana. They did not know personally the young man or his father, a California millionaire, whom they had heard was naturally much incensed at the blind folly of his only son.

When Mortimer returned to the hotel he was handed a note which Mr. Gray had left for him; to his great surprise he was told that his friend had suddenly taken his departure. Tearing open the note, he read as follows:

DEAR MORTIMER: Forgive my taking French leave of you, but, as I once told you, the unexpected is all that can help me and the unexpected I may find in Colorado, whence I will write you. I shall miss your company, mine will scarcely be a loss to you.

Faithfully yours

HERBERT GRAY.

"What a close-mouthed fellow Gray is," thought Mortimer, annoyed at the departure of his travelling companion, and hurt at his want of confidence. '*Cherchez la femme*'—of course there's a woman at the bottom of all this mystery. These musical fellows are always playing the deuce with women; he probably got into some entanglement years ago and doesn't see his way out of it. I wonder how he stands with Stella Fontaine," and then the good-looking journalist and best dancer in Washington reflected that the field might be clear for another fellow now that the classic-faced baritone would no longer be there on his, Mortimer's, return, and the thought was not an unpleasant one.

CHAPTER X.

"STELLA."

"Yes, Papa."

He had called several times before his voice reached her as she lay in the hammock under the twin apple trees that soft September afternoon, dreaming of the Washington days where life's sweetest page was being read with another and the reading had abruptly ceased at the most thrilling paragraph.

She tore herself from her reverie to drive with her father through the beautiful island park which is such an attraction to the city named after the river flowing beside it. Fortunately for Stella, she had had little time that summer for dangerously sweet dreams of a past happiness. La Fontaine was a hospitable house, and with guests constantly arriving and departing, in the exigencies of the present the hostess had little opportunity for retrospection. When she was not otherwise engaged, Stella was her father's companion in his walks and drives. They recited together scenes from Shakespeare, each taking a character and acting

it *con amore*, for both were born actors. They read French plays and conversed together in that language or in Italian, for Mr. Fontaine, who was an excellent linguist, was anxious that his daughter should keep in practice her knowledge of foreign tongues.

The tie between Laurent Fontaine and his youngest child had been strengthened as they watched together beside the dying being they both adored, and as Stella grew into womanhood her startling resemblance in looks and character to the wife who still lived in his heart, although she had gone from his presence, made the father sometimes actually fancy that in pity for his loneliness the spirit of the mother had flown back to earth to be re-incarnated in the daughter she had left him as her living likeness, and this thought made Stella doubly dear to him. Yet so unselfish was he in his affection, that he did not hesitate to part with her, when she asked his consent to go to one who claimed her often by the right of a soul relationship each had divined in the other in a meeting which would, by the unthinking, be ascribed to chance, but which undoubtedly was a thread of destiny.

On her return from previous visits to Washington, Stella was wont to amuse her family with descriptions of her life in the gay metropolis, and as her descriptive powers and sense of humor were keen, her social pictures were

much enjoyed by her father and her brother Arthur. This time she came home without any such budget. She accomplished her social duties in a preoccupied manner, and she was often abstracted and failed to respond with her former gay banter when Arthur, who was of an impressionable nature, came to her with the outpourings of a love affair. When at her father's request Stella played for him his favorite airs upon the harp, the instrument did not respond as usual to her touch. Annoyed herself at the change, she would stop abruptly and say that she was out of practice. "Yes," her father would reply, "very much so; you must work hard to make up for the time that you have lost." Sometimes she feared that he might have guessed the cloud that hung over her heart and pride came to her aid; she would meet, with a brave spirit, the future, whatever it might bring; she would conquer the turmoil of her soul with constant occupation. She planned duties for each hour of the day and left herself no leisure for idle thought. To her father's great pleasure the harp again sounded as he entered the house, again Stella brought him verses to criticise before she sent them over her *nom de plume* to the paper to which she occasionally contributed. A Grand-Army post, whose commander was a friend of the Fontaine family, wished to raise some money

for its charitable fund, and Stella grew interested in an amateur theatrical company ; she agreed to instruct the weak players in their parts and to take the principal one herself. A certain French play translated and adapted would do admirably for her stage. She had more than two months in which to prepare the performance. " It would be a success, it must be one," she wrote to Mrs. Leigh-Scott, for she was putting all the powers of her mind into the undertaking.

One delicious day in the golden October, but which was warm as midsummer, Stella, to please her brother Arthur, gave a flower lunch in honor of the young man's innamorata for the time being, a handsome New York girl, who was spending a few weeks in the hospitable city of Detroit. The table was placed upon the lawn, where, in the sunlight, glittered cut-glass, silver, and rare china. Above the gold embroidered centre of the table-cloth was a high mass of maidenhair fern and autumn leaves arranged on wires forming a bower, under which the guests sat. Representatives of favorite flowers wore the same, and were expected to celebrate them in original or selected verse according to the powers of the wearer. The object of the feast, attired in a stylish imported heliotrope-colored costume, with that flower at her corsage, was exonerated from the poetical tax, she having declared she could

never compose a rhyme and knew no poetry ; she therefore only looked pretty to the delight of her neighbor, Arthur, with whom she tried the oracle of the marguerite, which was the flower he wore that day.

N. B., whose contributions to the Poet's Corner of *Life*, made her the "Nota Bene" of numerous friends, wore a pale-green gown, with sunflowers all over it and also in her large black hat. She alternately teased and smiled upon her devoted admirer, a young divinity student, of whom she inquired if the lilac poppy he wore were indicative of the style of sermon he proposed to inflict upon his future hearers. When called upon for her verse, she gave a bit of the comic rhythmical philosophy with which she was wont to brighten the dark days of her life and to gather in all its sunshine.

A bright-faced poetess recited some pretty lines of her own composition in French, celebrating the sweet peas she wore. She said she was sorry that her favorite violets were out of season, whereupon a satirical young lawyer, wearing a brilliant nasturtium, remarked that in this age of "woman's rights" he supposed that the modest violet must be continually "out of season," and in a sarcastic tone, he quoted some lines from Tennyson's *Princess*.

" The world's male chivalry has perished out,
But women are Knights-errant to the last,
And if Cervantes had been Shakespeare too,
He had made Don a Donna."

said a chrysanthemum representative, announcing, as a supplement to Mrs. Browning's verses, that she intended to study law with Mr. Fontaine, Senior,—she added, perceiving Arthur's startled look, "if he would take her for a student," and that she hoped one day to be admitted to practise in the Supreme Court. "Perhaps," she said, turning with a smile to the legal satirist, "perhaps we may cross swords there together some time, who knows?"

"The great French poet is authority for the efficacy of woman's advice," said she. Then in a voice which boded well for her future forensic efforts, this would-be Portia recited a translation of Victor Hugo's lines :

" Man was saying how can we,
In our little boats at sea,
Pass the Guarda costas by ?
Row ! said Woman in reply."

This was received with much applause, the nasturtium wearer contenting himself with smiling rather disdainfully upon his fair opponent and her recitation.

A brilliant brunette, not being equal to original verses, had recourse to Bessie Chandler's, published in *Harper's Magazine*, to celebrate the resplendent Jacqueminot roses she wore.

A Princeton graduate, who had been busy with pencil and paper during this and the previous recitation, now produced a macaroni quatrain upon the quadruple charms of hair, teeth, eyes, and complexion of the blooming rose. She laughingly declared that, as she only understood the English line of the four, she should only reward him for that one, and she placed her finest rose next the marigold he wore.

"Spanish colors," said N. B., noting the decoration; "I shall write to the President of the Castilian Club in Boston, of which I am an honorary member, and propose you as Poet Laureate."

A four-leafed clover brought out some pretty verses.

Then a blue pond-lily was the object of an esthetic poem delivered with ultra English accent by its American wearer.

Golden-rod and purple aster were placed side by side as nature seats them in her way-side reunions, and were appropriately lauded in rhyme.

Paul Mortimer, who, the week previous, had made his appearance at La Fontaine with the announcement that he had secured a position upon a leading paper in Detroit, wore his favorite white carnation, and read some verses upon re-incarnation by the author of *The Light*

of Asia. He was somewhat distracted in his delivery by the neighborhood of his hostess, who looked remarkably well in an organdie muslin dress of mignonette pattern, and she wore bunches of the flower tied with blue ribbons in her large garden hat. When called upon for her contribution Stella blushing recited some verses which had appeared the week before in the Boston *Transcript* :

“THE LEGEND OF THE MIGNONETTE.

“ In a garden grew a flower ;
Humbly trailing it was found,
Bent by clustered petals downward
To the damp, cool, shady ground.

“ Day by day the master spied it,
In its neutral-tinted dress,
Called it dull and hateful blossom,
Vowed to ever love it less.

“ ‘ For,’ spake he, ‘ ’t is never laden
With the halo of perfume ;
’T is a soulless flower growing
Where bright roses fair should bloom ;

“ ‘Tis a weed that mars the garden—
Plant me flowers rich and rare.’
Thus he bade the keeper spade it
From his pathway everywhere.

“ As he spoke, a light supernal
Filled each corner of the place,
And the master looked and trembled
At the glory of a face.

"Smiling sadly down upon him,
With a look which seemed to say :
'Give this modest little creature
Of God's making leave to stay.'

"It was Mary—Virgin mother,
Like the morning, chaste and pure ;
Crowned with rosy rays from Heaven,
That his eyes could scarce endure.

"And low toward it she inclined her,
Till her lips had touched the plant ;
Breathing full upon its petals,
Swaying on the mossy slant.

"And the air grew faint with odors,
Sweeter than Arabian spice ;
Then the sainted Mary vanished ;
She had kissed the blossom thrice.

"Since that time in all the garden
Grows no sweeter thing as yet,
Than the lovely, heaven-born flower,
Than the fragrant mignonette."

As she pronounced the last line, she saw her father looking at her with the rapt expression his face wore when he was particularly pleased and proud of her.

"Come, Papa, your verse," said Stella, going to him and leading him to a seat near her own. "I see you have your favorite flower."

"My favorite flower," said Mr. Fontaine, touching the large heart's-ease he wore, which had evidently been recently culled from a bed

near the house, "must always be the Heart's-ease from my home garden, to the beauties of which no verse of mine could ever do justice; I feel the poetry I cannot express."

"The man who should attempt to transplant that special Heart's-ease to his own home garden would have a hard time, I fancy, with your father," said Paul Mortimer *sotto voce* to Stella, as he caught the fond glance Laurent Fontaine cast upon his daughter.

"Indeed he would," was the quick reply, for the father had heard the young man's words, low as they were spoken. "It must be well established that the soil of another garden is equally conducive to the well-being of my flower before I shall consent to part with it."

"I think," said Stella, in the same subdued tone, "that your flower, Papa, grows very well in its native soil, and needs no transplanting."

And then the conversation became general, gay laughter greeted jest, and toast followed toast, song succeeded song. The flower feast was a decided success, as all the participants agreed.

When the last guest had departed, long shadows fell upon the grass, the setting sun reflected bits of gold on fence and window pane, the russet foliage on the distant hills was sprinkled with red and yellow spots where Jack Frost the previous night had laid a light touch

upon his favorite maple leaf, and all contrasted well with the full-breasted clouds of thunder-gray patched with rose-pink, floating around a lake of tender blue sky, while farther down red deepened into purple, and in the changing light other clouds took grotesque forms of castles, of distant cities, crowned by snow-capped mountains. Stella, with that languid pleasurable sense induced by repose coming to utter weariness, lay in her hammock under the apple-trees, watching the every-moment changing picture nature displayed to her.

Drawing her shawl about her, she closed her eyes and fell into a profound sleep.

She was half awakened by a light kiss upon her forehead and her father's voice seemed to mingle with her dream. "I am so tired, Papa," she murmured, moving her head to a more comfortable position on the pillow. "Come into the house, Stella, it is far too chilly for you here, and besides some one is waiting for you there," and he placed his arm about her. Stella sprang from the hammock, a sudden, foolish, unreasonable thought dyeing her cheek crimson as she followed her father. "Mrs. Leigh-Scott! How delightful, how very unexpected!"

"The unexpected is the only certainty in life," said the visitor, returning Stella's warm embrace, then to the question of why she had not telegraphed of her coming that she might have been

met at the station, Mrs. Leigh-Scott replied :
“ I came on an impulse ; I wanted your father’s advice with respect to a real-estate investment, and I wanted to see you, Stella.”

“ I fancy the latter was the real reason,” said the lawyer, laughing ; “ Mrs. Leigh-Scott has a sound judgment of her own and she is not fond of taking advice.”

“ Well,” said the latter, good-naturedly, “ I believe you are about right ; I am not more fond of taking advice than most people are, and perhaps I am too fond of giving it. I confess, Stella, I did come from Clearbrook in the hope of taking you back with me, though, I suppose, I shall have some difficulty in securing you, as you always are a ‘ bone of contention ’ between your father and myself.”

“ From Clearbrook—you came all the way from Clearbrook ? ”

“ What is a journey from the Granite State to the Wolverine to such a globe-trotter as myself ? Yes, I am commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Scott to take you to a harvest festival in Clearbrook, dancing in Maurice’s new barn, of which he is very proud, and which, like most residents in the country, he has built directly in front of his house, thus cutting off a considerable portion of the fine view. His wife did her best to get him to put it behind the house, but on this point, although he has yielded

others, he was obstinate. Maurice wished me to invite you to bring your harp ; he seems to consider you a sort of wandering minstrel as you took it to Washington, and he thinks it would 'mix in well with the instruments of the Clearbrook band.' He has provided himself for the occasion with a new suit like that of Daniel Webster in the full-length portrait which hangs in the library of the Manor house—blue coat, brass buttons, buff vest, and all."

"I wish I could go to the harvest festival, I should immensely enjoy 'dancing in the barn' with Mr. Scott in his Webster suit," said Stella, "but it is quite impossible for me to leave home."

"I shall not despair of you," was the rejoinder ; "this is but the first time of asking, and you know I am not easily put off. I want you to see Maurice revised and corrected by matrimony ; he constantly regrets that he has allowed so many years of domestic bliss to escape him."

"He ought to be grateful to you ; the marriage was your work, you know," said Stella, laughing.

"No, I was only the instrument chosen by fate to work out their destiny." A shadow crossed her face as she thought of the two hearts she had brought together and fate had separated.

"I shall be anxious when Stella goes to you again," said Mr. Fontaine, "lest you may find

an instrument with which to work out her destiny."

"What will be, must be," replied Mrs. Leigh-Scott. "That is a sure law of nature, and when the inevitable comes, you and I, my dear sir, must bow to it. Let us hope that the unexpected may work out Stella's happiness." Then in a lighter tone she said: "Let me tell you of the happy pair living their busy idyllic life in Clearbrook. To begin with the marriage, the bride having overruled her bridegroom's plan of a 'big wedding in the country in April,' Congress having adjourned, Maurice insisted upon no longer adjourning his happiness; they were married quietly in Washington, Bessie Harding coming from school to be present. Her stepfather completely won the child's heart by presenting her with a gold watch and chain and a dressing-case. He bought new luggage for all the party. I fortunately rescued the bride's from starting upon its travels as 'A S S.' Maurice declared it an absurd custom to mark a woman's belongings with any letter but the one she was to bear the rest of her life; he did not reflect upon the combination the initials of Abby Susan Scott would make. I finally persuaded him to omit the middle initial, and thus reduce the disrespectful noun to a less significant adverb. Maurice declares that at the expiration of

his term in Congress he will retire into private life, and never leave home again. He has plans enough for the improvement of the village, of which he is president, to keep him busy for a lifetime. He has instituted a Tourists' Club, of which he is also president, and which meets once a fortnight, in a hall in Clearbrook, rented for social purposes. Papers prepared by the literary members of the club, upon some given city or country, are read and discussed, and in this inexpensive manner imaginary journeys are made by the stay-at-homes. Alternate evenings are devoted to *musicales*, shadow pantomimes, and sometimes a dance, in all of which junior and senior members of the Clearbrook Social Club join. Maurice is also eloquent in condemnation of the 'vile practice' of the use of the 'weed,' and equally anxious to preserve the purity of the new cement sidewalks—which are taking the place of broken boards—and of the clothes and mouths of the village. He prefaced his address to the school-children of his anti-gum-chewing society when he distributed badges with ice-cream, by saying that as the 'boy is father to the man,' so gum is parent to the 'weed,' and he promises to all who will abstain from the former a May-day festival, with games and refreshments, to which children of larger growth who will throw away their tobacco shall be welcome. He has won the

thanks of the school teachers by instituting this Mayflower Society; they rejoice in the banishment of chewing-gum from desks, fingers, and mouths of the scholars. Reports of the doings of the societies now replace the dreary obituaries and details of sickness which formerly filled the Clearbrook column of the *County Echo*. That part of the paper is now much more cheerful weekly literature.

"Mrs. Scott is no less energetic in her efforts for the public welfare than is her husband. Having with some difficulty persuaded Maurice to allow her to dispossess the Manor house of the accumulation of years of old feather-beds, ancient, moth-eaten raiment, and equally useless furniture, she has renovated and improved the old house, kept its distinctive features, and introduced modern improvements, with French windows opening upon wide verandas filled with plants and flowers; with Colonial paint outside and comfort and luxuries within, she has made it a very attractive residence.

"Mindful of the intellectual needs of her sex, most of whom have hitherto only enjoyed poor health, Mrs. Scott has started a Reading Room with Circulating Library, and adjoining it a Coffee Room, which in time may be like those in cities, where a square meal of good materials may be eaten or sent out at a very moderate expense. She has sent for one of those ranges

by which the Boston philanthropist provides dinners of several courses cheaper than the materials can be bought by housekeepers. It has an oven in which bread for a family may be placed and the cook go to church, to a picnic, or a church festival, and find her loaves baked when she returns.

"This Coffee House will be a great boon to the sickly, worn-out mother of a family, who, in the impossibility of getting good 'help' in the country, often helps herself to her grave with hard work. I find that in the country everything is canned—vegetables, fruit, and even affections. I could not get an un-canned lima bean when I was at Clearbrook, and second wives are as common as first ones; not even the sunlight and fresh air of heaven are enjoyed by the poor No. 1's, over whose coffins the neighbors shake their heads and say: 'Pity she's gone; she was too ambitious, poor soul.' Ambition should be made of sterner 'stuff' than to fade the color from cheeks by keeping carpets unfaded for 'his second wife.' The first, in best gown, and wearing also an uneasy expression at being a few moments idle, looks sadly down from her gilt-framed photograph on the wall at her young blooming successor, who, 'wiser in her generation,' has made it a condition of marrying the widower, that she is to have a 'hired girl' and go to all the picnics she chooses.



"Maurice has actually persuaded the retired farmers to join him in putting water-works and a Fire Company into Clearbrook before the rest of the village burns down, half of it having been demolished during the years some precaution against fire has been talked of."

"What a public benefactor Mr. Scott appears to be," said Stella. "You certainly roused his philanthropy, Mrs. Leigh-Scott."

"I read him last winter the opening sentence of Calvert's *Life of Rubens*," was the reply. "He seemed much impressed by the words: 'A man's life is valuable in proportion as the liver has endowed his fellow-men profitably with himself. To possess powers which in unfolding and exerting themselves flow out in good upon one's neighbors is a mark of superiority.' I think, however, the woman he has married did more than Calvert or I to rouse his best powers to activity. I shall always have a respect for a 'Chicken Sociable,' since it was at one that Maurice first met Abby, and as his is a tenacious nature, the idea of marrying her, having once entered his mind, remained there until the opportunity for carrying it out occurred. She is exactly the wife for him, she has brought out the best in him. A man's career may be made or marred according as he marries. I believe that God made man and woman both different in qualities in order that they should assist and

develop mutually for the benefit of themselves and the world, and when that fact shall be recognized there will be a moral and social improvement. Mutual interests and occupations bring hearts and brains together, and the home and State are so dependent, one upon the other, that they require the man and wife to be equally interested in both."

"But," said Arthur, "don't you think a woman loses her charm of feminine grace if she mixes with politics?"

"Why need she?" was the reply. "The strongest woman suffragist to whom I ever listened wore such a well-fitting, stylish dress, and used her pretty hands so gracefully when speaking in a sweet voice, every word she uttered telling, that a whole opera house was spell-bound, and even the roughs in the gallery, who came to scoff, cheered her heartily at the close of her speech. This woman is a practising lawyer in partnership with her husband, and she has a family of sons and daughters whom she has brought up in a creditable manner."

"The great mistake is, that so many clever woman suffragists ruin their cause by taking the aggressive tone instead of the conciliatory one when they urge the right of every property-holder, man and woman alike, to Otis' watchword: 'No taxation without representation.'"

"Very true," replied Mr. Fontaine, "tact is

the rarest of all qualities with both sexes, and it is also one of the strongest powers in any movement; coercion, the weakest. Arbitration will take the place of war as civilization continues. And woman, too, will gain the ballot; it is coming slowly but surely. This is the age of woman's progress; she is coming to the front everywhere, and with a higher education she is lifting herself to a higher life, and man with her, for emulation is the great motor in life, and the world is getting better work from man and woman in consequence of the rivalry. Capacity for position is, as it should be, the question, rather than if the candidate wear a dress or a coat. It is the day of the survival of the fittest."

"Well," said Arthur, "if woman claims man's privileges she ought to share his penalties, and a woman who commits murder be punished with the full rigor of the law."

"Quite right," replied his father; "I have no patience with the sickly sentiment which would mitigate the punishment of a woman in favor of her sex; the law in crime should know no sex."

"I agree with you," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott, "and as woman usually runs to extremes, a wicked woman is generally worse than a wicked man, and therefore a greater injury to society."

"Then," said Arthur, "if women are allowed

to vote we shall have still more corruption at the polls than we have now."

"There would undoubtedly be many objectionable women at first—all reforms have their mistakes; but the thing would right itself, and the good women would counterbalance the bad. I believe that co-operation in all things would tend to the improvement of man and woman."

"The co-operation of a well-informed woman, who was able to come to the assistance of her brilliant husband, exhausted in health by his arduous labors, helped to complete the Brooklyn Bridge," said Mr. Fontaine. "It stands a splendid monument of man's scientific skill and of woman's devotion of heart and brain."

"And," said N. B., "if it had not been for Mrs. Columbus' encouragement and for her paternal charts, her husband would never have had the courage to ask Queen Isabella to help to discover America. So we owe our existence as a nation to two women as well as to one man."

"Small thanks to them; if Isabella had kept to her own sphere, instead of troubling herself about a new hemisphere, and if Columbus' wife had mended her husband's clothes—I have no doubt his stockings were full of holes—instead of poring over maps, I might have been born an Englishman," said Anglomaniac Arthur.

"You don't deserve the proud privilege of

being an American citizen," interrupted his sister, indignantly.

"It is the fault of his foreign education," said the young man's father. "I made a great mistake when I sent Arthur to Oxford, instead of to Harvard. I am convinced it is far better for a man to grow up and form associations in the country in which he is to live and work."

"But you, sir, were educated in Europe," said Arthur.

"I was sent to school in France, but I was born in America," was the reply, "and I was early drilled by my father in the principles of 'Democracy in America.' When your grandfather became an adopted citizen of the United States, he did so with the wish to make his children good Americans. You, my son, inherit his features; you can never pass for an Englishman, nature has decided against that."

"Not even if he acquire the true royal pump-handle hand-shake?" asked N. B., demurely.

"Not even with that poor exchange for the hearty English greeting," was the reply. "And now, my true American daughter," he added, turning to Stella, "give us the *Red, White, and Blue*, and Arthur shall do penance for his unpatriotic sentiments by joining in the chorus."

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"Tell me about Mildred," said Stella, as she

sat that night with her guest in the latter's bedroom.

"The child spent the summer at the seaside with Judge and Mrs. Chester," was the reply. "You know, I suppose, that Herbert Gray is in Colorado?"

"Yes," said Stella; "his sister wrote me that her brother had resigned his seat in Congress and would live in Colorado and send for his child."

"Let us hope that the unexpected may bring him back to those he loves," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott.

There was no reply to this, but the kiss which Stella imprinted upon the cheek of her guest, as she bade her good-night, was, perhaps, even more fervent than usual.

CHAPTER XI.

"WHAT brings Paul Mortimer to Detroit?" asked Mrs. Leigh-Scott, as she sat the next day with the Fontaine family and N. B., who was dining there.

"Are you responsible, Stella, for depriving Washington of its best dancer?"

"Mr. Mortimer is on the staff of a Detroit paper," replied Stella.

"He talks well," remarked N. B., "but when he gets on Theosophy I cannot follow him; he seems to be chasing himself round the block."

"That's about it," said Arthur, as the rest laughed at the original comparison; "I don't see how he ever finds himself."

"I think the young man would like to find the way into my home garden and transplant my Heart's-ease into his own—eh, Stella," said Mr. Fontaine.

"Nonsense, Papa, Mr. Mortimer is not a marrying man; he is wedded to his own peculiar theories of life and after life."

"He is rather too occult for any woman to risk matrimony with," remarked N. B. "There

might be danger of his returning to the love of his previous existence ; he says we all of us have had a previous existence. I wonder if I could have lived before in the form of the witch who, far back in the annals of our family, was burnt on Boston Common in the superstitious days of 'The Hub.' In support of this theory there is my delight in the witch's train, as Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'over his teacups,' calls the electric cars. I feel perfectly at home in them. Do you think, Stella, I could ever have been a witch?"

"I think you are full of witchery now," said Stella, laughing. "As you say, Mr. Mortimer is certainly hard to follow, but his 'investigations' make his conversation interesting."

"Yes," said her father, "the young man is bright and well read; after all, why not his solution of the enigma as well as another; the whole question of life is an enigma, and must remain such until each of us shall solve it for himself. Meanwhile, it is an attractive subject to all thinking minds; each one discusses it according to his own standpoint. One German writer, Schleiermacher, gives his creed thus: 'Philosophy and religion are wed; no man can be a true philosopher without being a religious man; and, reciprocally, a religious man must be a philosopher.' To which another German thinker, Schopenhauer, replies: 'A truly religious man

has no need of philosophy ; no true philosopher is a religious man. He walks without fetters, at his own risk, but freely.' ”

“ I like better than either, the belief of my dear old poet, Aaron Hill,” said Mrs. Leigh-Scott. “ He says :

“ ‘ Peacefully, patient, let me travel on
Life’s unoffending journey ; mark, well pleased,
New prospects, manners, tastes, beliefs, changed modes,
New systems—every view that sides my way,
Unprejudiced to any ; till—at last
Death opening truth’s barred gate, ’t is time to see
God’s meaning in the light his presence lends.’ ”

“ A beautiful philosophy and religion, by which any man might be glad to live and die,” said Mr. Fontaine.

There is in the Art Museum of Detroit a large painting by a native artist, which represents Evangeline at the moment when she stands by the couch of the patient in the hospital, in whom she recognizes her long-lost love. The hand holding the flowers drops by her side in that sudden earnest gaze.

“ I think,” said N. B., who stood with Stella one morning looking at this recent addition to the gallery, “ I think that the artist might have made Gabriel in better preservation. Evangeline went through the same long trial of years of waiting, and she kept her looks much better.

How sweet she is in that nun's cap! Even if Gabriel had been ill so long, he need not have gone off so completely. I could not be constant to a man, 'sans eyes, sans teeth, sans everything,' could you?"

"Yes you could, and would," replied Stella. "There are depths of tenderness in your nature, my dear friend, though you try to disguise them. I would trust you far more in the time of need than I would many who make professions of sentiment."

The bright black eyes of the poet of *Life's* corner, usually sparkling with amusement, were dimmed by the diamond-like tear which glistened in them as she silently pressed the hand of the girl who fathomed her true nature better than it was generally understood.

N. B. moved on to the Rubens, which was once the property of Louis Napoleon, given by him to a resident of Detroit who had been kind to him when he was an exile in America. This patron of art presented the picture to the gallery.

Stella remained looking at the Evangeline. She was wondering if her Gabriel would be equally changed when they met; if, indeed, they were destined ever to meet again.

Three weeks later, Stella sat in the theatre in Chicago, where her father, having business, had taken her with him. It was a Bernhardt per-

formance. Herbert Gray had gone to the great city on mining affairs, and had also visited the theatre. Had Stella turned her head, their eyes must have met ; as it was, each was unconscious of the presence of the other.

CHAPTER XII.

TO the traveller from the Eastern States, the comfort and luxury of the hotels in the new Western cities is a revelation. He almost fancies himself in New York, Paris, or Vienna as he gives his orders to the French or German waiter who quietly hands him the menu in the restaurant, decorated in artistic manner, where tables upon which cut-glass, fine linen, and delicate china make the excellent *cuisine* still more appetizing. In such an hotel, The Acme at Denver, in one of its most attractive apartments, where the rose-colored hangings between the glass window and heavy draperies cast a soft light subduing the glare of the bright sunlight without, sat a woman still handsome, though her face, in spite of the careful hand of art to conceal them, showed signs of the ravages of illness and of a life of strong excitement.

A bright fire burned in the open grate, but the woman shivered from time to time and drew closer about her the sable-lined cloak which covered her rich *peignoir*, and her small, narrow foot beat impatiently upon the carpet, while she

clenched the thin, white, blue-veined hand which lay upon the arm of her chair as she kept a searching glance from her large, violet-blue eyes upon the man facing her.

He was of slight figure, but extremely well proportioned, with a strong face, which bore signs of hard struggling with the world and of fertility in expedients; it was furrowed by anxious thought, and his thin lips had lines in the corner, while around the small, bright, black eyes were dark hollows.

The biscuit-shaped, bare summit of his head was surrounded by black hair. His well-shaped small hand was evidently his pride; he kept looking at it whenever he removed his gaze from the face of his companion. His clothes were well cut but not in their first youth, but his linen was fine and immaculate, and so were his boots, which set off his small, high-insteped foot. He was evidently a man who had mixed in all circles and could accommodate himself to his company.

"I have a splendid scheme now," said Gideon Vane, for it was he who sat with La Montana at The Acme.

"You always have," was the sarcastic reply, "but your splendid schemes generally fail."

"Was it my fault that you lost your temper and killed poor Sultane, a mare worth its weight in gold, and nearly killed yourself?"

He spoke quietly, without the least excitement; he might have been paying her a compliment, so gentle was his tone.

"Come, come," he added, "we can't afford to quarrel, we are necessary to each other; remember it was I who took you from the asylum in which your precious husband thought he had you safe out of harm's way; that was a fine trick we played upon him, eh!"

"Yes," she said, looking gratefully at him, "if it had not been for you I might still be behind bolts and bars. How I hate that man!" she exclaimed passionately.

"Why not get a divorce on the ground of cruelty, and reward little Freddie for his devotion?"

"Marry Freddie!" she exclaimed. "He bores me now with his protestations; as a husband he would be insufferable. Besides, although I have found marriage a failure, I do not approve of divorce, especially to give the man I hate a chance to be happy with another woman. No, Herbert Gray and I are legally bound together until death us do part. But I never want to see him again." Then before she could continue, he said: "By the way, Herbert Gray is looking for you; you nearly gave yourself away with the trinket you gave that girl Salamon."

"You really ought to be more prudent, Alice,"

he added, impressively. "If it had not been for me he certainly would have tracked you."

She bent forward, her lips parted, her eyes dilated, and she laid her hand upon his coat sleeve, as she listened to him breathlessly.

He smiled soothingly, and said, in a reassuring voice: "Don't be alarmed, I bluffed the detective who tried to pass himself off to me for a travelling man at the races in New Orleans. I pretended to fall into his game. I gave him points.

"We happened to meet just as I had a run of luck upon 'Tariff Reform.' I won a pile of money on that horse.

"Well, as I was saying, the man and I grew very chummy, we took several drinks together, and I talked with him confidentially about the circus business. I told him how it had come to grief by the accident to La Montana, the beautiful lady rider; how she had been ordered to the south of France by her physician, though he had but little hopes of her surviving the voyage. I described the great lady rider as a society leader, who, tired of the dulness of her life, had sought excitement in the ring."

"You said that!" exclaimed his companion in alarm.

"Oh, trust me," he replied blandly. "I always know what I am about; if all other things fail, I shall turn detective."

"I do trust you," she murmured.

"Well," continued Vane, "I thought I would draw it pretty strong, so I got up a romance for you, said you were of noble Italian blood. I threw in a hint of a morganatic marriage with a reigning prince and a desire upon the part of his family to make some arrangement by which to avert a scandal.

"And now for my little plan," continued the man, acknowledging with a smile the tribute to his inventive powers paid by his listener in the expressive glance of her beautiful eyes.

"What you have got to do is to get well—and when you are strong enough, after burying La Montana with the honors due her merit and success in the profession, you will rise like a phoenix from her ashes and appear in the saddle—your throne—as an Englishwoman, and we will take the world by storm—but in Canada or Australia or perhaps South America, not here, no, the United States is not the place for us.—Cussed fool Jules was," he muttered, "ever to come to the United States with his circus!—However, here we found our golden-hearted daisy. *Il t'aime beaucoup, passionnément*. Where, by the way, is *le jeune amoureux*, our dear little Freddie? I must go or he will be jealous if he sees me here, and then he will make a scene and excite you; you must avoid excitement if you wish to get well."

"Oh, Freddie is off with a long list of things I sent him to get for me; we are safe for an hour or more."

Vane threw himself back in a chair, took up a *pince-nez* dangling by its chain, placed it in position, and looked critically at his companion for a few moments. At length he said:

"Did you ever care for Gray? Did you ever care for anybody?"

"Perhaps," she replied, with an ambiguous smile.

"I don't believe you ever had a heart. How came you to marry Gray anyhow?"

"I married for a home, as you very well know, and to get away from my step-mother."

"Pretty hard lines. I had to beat a retreat myself for fear that step-mother of yours would ask my intentions. So Gray was regularly roped in like our friend Freddie, only led a little farther—to the altar."

"By the way," he said, taking up the double, heart-shaped gilt frame which contained two photographs, "this is a capital likeness; you and Freddie look like B. and G. instead of brother and sister. Is n't that your latest relationship?"

"We pass for such," she replied laughingly. "Freddie speaks of me as his sister to my maid whom he engaged in San Francisco, and she is fully convinced that he is the best of brothers. Poor Freddie," she said musingly,

"is always begging me to marry him ; he thinks I am free."

"Lucky for him she is not," thought Vane. "The fool is capable of any extent of folly." Aloud he said :

"I advise you to cover those tell-tale locks with a wig of some other color. By Jove !" he exclaimed, struck with admiration as the sunlight fell upon the heavy coil of burnished gold, "your hair is magnificent ; I never saw any to compare with it. Try this," he said, passing over to her the *pince-nez* ; "if the fire of your eyes should chance to strike one of Gray's men, Freddie Fortescue would not know how to deal with him."

She laughed as she adjusted the eye-glass upon her nose, then rising she disappeared through an adjoining door. In a few minutes she reappeared in a wig of short chestnut curls, the eye-glass in place, and wrapped in a gray shawl with a small black bag in her hand. She stood demurely before him.

"Capital !" he said. "You look like a New England school-marm. Even Freddie would be disenchanted if he were to see you."

She laughingly dropped into the chair she had previously occupied near her visitor, removed the shawl, and taking off the wig she threw it and the bag on the adjoining sofa, while she handed the eye-glass to its owner.

"I will wear the wig in driving or walking," she said. "I shall tell Freddie it is one of my caprices, and it will flatter him to think I keep my own hair for his eyes alone."

Again she laughed, and her companion smiled, with the expressive twist of the lip peculiar to him. "But," she continued, "I cannot stand glasses; besides, I always wear a thick veil for my own protection."

"Well, be prudent, remember the enemy is on the alert. And now," he said, rising, "I must be off, you shall hear from me before long. *Soignez vous, ma belle*, avoid all excitement, above all avoid that infernal drug."

She interrupted him angrily, but at the first word a fit of coughing choked her; she put her handkerchief to her lips and Vane saw that there were drops of blood upon it. He quietly poured water into a glass from the carafe on the table laid for two, where also he found the salt-cellar, and having emptied its contents into the tumbler, gave the mixture to the woman with the air of one accustomed to her attacks. "Now lie down," he said, coaxingly, arranging the pillow on the sofa for her. "Shall I call your maid?" She shook her head, dropped into the spot he had prepared for her, and closed her eyes.

Vane stood for a moment looking at her, then noiselessly left the room, but just outside the

door he said to a chambermaid who was passing: "The lady in that room has been taken ill, you had better send her maid to her."

A young man, dressed in the height of fashion, with a flower in his coat and armed with an immense bouquet of Jacqueminot roses, ran lightly up the stairs, too pre-occupied to notice any one near him.

Vane smiled to himself as he thought: "What perversity! that boy is rich enough to marry any choice bud of society, and he clings to a faded flower.

"Poor Alice, she is played out. What luck for her that she had fooled that golden youth into caring for her now that she has no one else."

And Freddie Fortescue knelt by the side of the woman for whom he had sacrificed everything. He held her hand in his and looked into her eyes, trying to find some response to his passionate gaze. He was very young, very little versed in reading of any kind, least of all in human nature or in the nature of a woman years older than himself, and older than many of her years in the experience of life.

She buried her face for a few moments in the mass of roses he had brought her, then threw them impatiently aside.

She scarcely tasted the choice morsels of the bird he carved for her and brought to her, hoping to tempt her fitful appetite.

"How good you are to me, Freddie," she suddenly exclaimed, laying upon his breast the head from which the red-gold tresses, uncoiled by her impetuous movement, fell in a shower about her. "Will you always be good to me, always?"

"Always," he answered fervently.

She kissed his young forehead, she stroked his fair locks, and he thought in his folly, "At last she loves me."

"Yes," said Alice, "I will get well. I must get well. We will bury the Montana, and then——"

"And then you will be mine, all mine."

She smiled, but she was not thinking of the boy lover who was drinking in her words. She was thinking of Vane, of future triumphs, of revenge upon the man she hated—the man who was looking for her, his wife. And fate all the while was weaving the threads of the destiny of each.

A few days later there was a flurry in front of The Acme at the departure of the beautiful Mrs. Mowbray, of England, and Mr. Algernon Frederic Smith, whose devotion to his invalid sister had been so commented upon by all who saw them together.

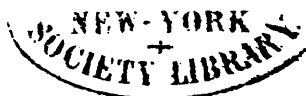
"I'd rather live in Bohemia than any other land," hummed Gideon Vane, standing on the

sidewalk, as he caught the farewell wave of the hand of the *soi-disant* Mrs. Mowbray extended from the rapidly retreating carriage. And so those two parted, never to meet again.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I NEVER could have pulled through if it had not been for Collingwood's doctoring and for my sister Stella's nursing," said the convalescent who had been ordered to Colorado Springs to gain strength after an attack of double pneumonia. As he spoke he looked up into his host's face with the duplicate of the pair of large liquid blue eyes which had returned Herbert Gray's sad farewell glance the evening of the concert in Washington. Stella's brother was her lover's guest in the pretty Queen Anne cottage the latter had built for himself in one of the most picturesque spots in this grand panorama of nature, a site commanding a fine view of Pike's Peak, that barometer of Colorado residents and visitors, who instinctively look to see if any dark threatening clouds crown the mountain when an excursion is in contemplation.

The search for his wife had occupied all Gray's thoughts for weeks and months after his arrival in Colorado, but as summer faded into autumn and still nothing could be learned of La Montana or of the young fellow who was



said to have followed her, this hope gradually became dimmer until it seemed a mere phantom of imagination. To drown distracting thought and to occupy his time, Gray rode for miles through this, to him, unexplored country; he climbed mountains, he visited wonderful passes, through which engineering skill had made the "iron horse" to find a way for the astonished traveller, who, while dashing along with ever increasing speed, gazes in breathless admiration at the great wall of rock on either side. Gray's old instincts came back to him, and he spent days and nights in mining camps. He bought an interest in a newly discovered mine then attracting considerable attention, and he helped to work it. At times a terrible home-sickness came over him; he longed to see his child, he longed for the daily pleasant intercourse of friends which had made Washington life so delightful to him. In one of these moods he was persuaded to take up his residence in Colorado. He determined to bring his child to this growing country, where the pure air of its high altitude might strengthen Mildred's body, and the school-room of nature expand her mind. In the formation of his little daughter's character he still might find an interest in life. He sent in his resignation from Congress, and prepared to live the life of a miner.

Engrossed with his pursuits and his plans, Gray knew little of the world outside the few acquaintances he had made in the way of business, or for Mildred's sake. There was one family to which he was specially drawn on account of its two bright little girls near the age of his own, and also because of the pleasant, hospitable tone of the house. He played whist there certain evenings of the week, he dropped in unceremoniously and talked books with the literary wife, or discussed mines and smoked with the mining husband. He was glad these people were not musical; he avoided musical houses, and in none of those which he frequented was it guessed that his splendid baritone voice had been the delight of the musical world of Washington.

One day, Herbert Gray, who had not visited the hotel for months, sat, with the friend above alluded to, on the piazza of The Antlers. The hotel omnibus drove up as the two men smoked and talked together. Suddenly Gray recognized one of the numerous arrivals. Though pale and emaciated, looking very unlike the handsome junior partner and son of the distinguished Michigan lawyer Gray had met casually in Washington, Stella's lover could not mistake Stella's brother. Gray sprang forward to greet the newcomer, seized the travelling bag and umbrella from the porter's grasp, and claimed Mr. Fontaine

as his guest. It is always agreeable to meet a familiar face in a strange land, how much more so to the lonely invalid, wearied by a long journey and disheartened at the thought of the further effort of establishing himself in his hotel before he can seek the much required rest. Arthur Fontaine, though surprised at the effusive greeting of the man whom he had considered a slight acquaintance, was only too glad to avail himself of the opportune invitation, and Gray had little difficulty in persuading him to surrender himself and his belongings into his hospitable hands.

"What a Godsend you have been to me, Gray," continued Arthur Fontaine, whose account of his severe illness we interrupted in the commencement of this chapter in order to give the necessary details of his installation in "The Shanty," as Gray called the cosy little house in which, with the aid of a Mongolian well trained man-of-all-work, he kept bachelor's hall, and where Arthur Fontaine had been his guest for one month. "I wrote to my sister this morning how much you have done for me," added the invalid, looking up into his friend's face with a grateful smile and light in the blue eyes which recalled vividly another pair Gray loved so well. "I must get back to work, I am getting so strong now." "Yes," he said in response to the deprecating motion of his host,

"I have trespassed already too long upon your kindness, I must go home in a day or two."

"If you only knew," interrupted Herbert Gray, "how much, how very much your society has been to me you would not talk of trespassing." Then catching the glance that brought back to his mind another's—overpowered by his emotion, he suddenly turned away and occupied himself with folding a paper which had been thrown on the floor.

"Go back with me," said Fontaine, rising from the piazza chair in which he had been lounging while taking his sun bath. Then, as Gray silently shook his head, the guest continued in his most persuasive tone: "Do go home with me and let Stella thank you herself for all your care of her patient, and give me the pleasure of showing you an old-fashioned home. It's not often that one roof has sheltered three generations—four, I may say, for my grandfather built the house, my father, my sisters, and myself were born there, and my married sister brings her children to La Fontaine whenever she can persuade her professor husband to take a vacation with his family. Come and hear Stella play the harp, her mother's harp, in the music room at La Fontaine. You should hear Stella play."

"I have had that pleasure," replied the man upon whom Stella's brother was unwittingly inflicting so much torture.

"Then you must surely want to hear her again—she plays as well as a professional, if I do say it. Stella 's a brick of a sister," continued the appreciative brother ; "there is only one thing I can't persuade her to do for me"—

"And that is?"

"To marry Collingwood. He 's desperately in love with her ; he 's the prince of good fellows, plays the best game of billiards of any man I know, likes music and poetry and all that sort of thing, and has a splendid practice for so young a man. I don't see how she could possibly do better. She 's cut out for a doctor's wife as I often tell her."

"Had n't we better take advantage of this fine day to drive to 'The Garden of the Gods'—you ought to see it before you leave," and as Gray spoke he kicked across the piazza the unoffending stand with its receiver for cigar ashes, which the careful Mongolian had placed between the chairs of the smokers, and which, man-like, they had ignored to drop their ashes anywhere and everywhere. Fontaine looked up, surprised at his host's vivacious action. He did not know that in default of having the individual under this treatment, the stand represented to Gray the highly lauded Dr. Collingwood, the *parti* selected for Stella by Stella's brother.

"There are actually two carriage loads of tourists on the way, and we don't know how

many we shall find discussing the marvels of The Garden of the Gods. What a nuisance one can never have nature to oneself!" said Gray as he and his guest spun along the road in a light buggy, behind the thorough-bred chestnut which the owner never allowed any one but himself to drive.

"There is no spot on the habitable globe unattainable to progress and enterprise," said Fontaine; "I expect to find that the ubiquitous Quaker has dropped Jacob's Oil on the summit of Pike's Peak the next time I see it. If the North Pole should ever be discovered, it will not be long before the advertising Yankee with chiropodist's foot and labelled back will get there. It would not surprise me to hear that Lydia Pinkham's picture even now adorns an Eskimo hut, and that the children there cry for Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup."

"My God, she will be killed!" This exclamation was drawn from Gray's lips as a horse, over which the rider had evidently no control, tore past them. It was closely followed by another horse, which, in spite of the rider's frantic efforts, evidently would never overtake the other. Horror stricken at the thought of the woman's inevitable fate, Gray drove rapidly towards the great red stone natural entrance posts, but when he reached them he saw that the catastrophe he had dreaded had already

taken place. Throwing the reins to his companion, he sprang to the ground, to the aid of the men from a livery carriage standing near, who were bending over the prostrate horse, which had fallen on the body of its rider, as it had dashed against the gigantic sentinel rock at the entrance of The Garden of the Gods. Gray's quiet power asserted itself even over the excited, grief-crazed youth whose attempts to assist the others only impeded their efforts. He pushed the boy away, and with the other two men finally succeeded in raising the horse. When he looked with reverent awe at the face of the dead woman, Gray saw that the all-powerful, stern severer of earthly ties had set him free—the terrible unexpected had come to him in The Garden of The Gods, as the Indians, those simple-hearted children of nature, call its majestic open temple. But there was no elation in the knowledge of his freedom, only a great awe and shock at the terrible death suddenly snapping the chain which had bound those two uncongenial ones legally together. Only a deep pity for the poor dead woman who had so wrecked her life and brought sorrow into his, who had never known the happiness of a true wife's love for her husband, a true mother's affection for and from her child. He stood with folded hands and bowed head, thinking how fate had brought this all about. Who

shall say we work out our own destinies? He stood apart from those who had gathered around the dead woman and none there guessed that he was her husband.

The young lover, in the unbridled passion of his temperament and his inexperience, braving his father's anger and his own worldly prospects to follow the woman who had caught the fancy he had mistaken for love, had thrown himself in his frantic grief upon her breast, and was imploring his "darling Alice" to speak to him. He called her by every endearing epithet, he lavished fond embraces upon her cold lips, and when, at last, realizing that she could not return them—that she was really dead, he wept convulsively, as though sobbing out his very heart, while the by-standers stood in silent sympathy.

Gray touched him gently on the arm, and placing his own tenderly under the dead woman's head, he said : "Come, let us take her home."

"Home?" exclaimed the boy, starting up and gazing wildly about him.

"Yes," repeated Gray, in a tone that was not to be gainsaid; "to my home. I am—the guardian of her child; I alone have the right to take her home."

Alice's lover looked for a moment as though he were about to dispute this right, but there

was that in the face of the man who claimed it which was not to be disputed, and so, before the remains of Alice Gray were committed to the grave, they rested in her husband's house.

It seemed to Gray a strange sarcasm of fate, that the husband and the lover of the dead woman should stand side by side at her grave. He had read of husbands shooting the lovers of their faithless wives, he had never before heard of the one consoling the other for the death of the same woman, yet young Fortescue clung to the man whom he assisted to carry the dead form of his beloved from the spot where she fell. He seemed to take a melancholy pleasure in telling of his love, little guessing to whom he was telling it. He had been fascinated by La Montana at a performance at the circus; he had made her acquaintance, and in his infatuation, had offered to marry her, and "I would gladly have done so if she would have married me," he said. But she told him that she did not believe in marriage, that *l'union libre* was the only tie worth anything; that she had made one unhappy venture and would never make another. He told how he had taken her to his ranch in California, that she had soon tired of the pretty spot, and insisted upon change, always change; that at Denver, where they had spent a few weeks, she had had a hemorrhage of the lungs, and the doctors had

ordered her to a higher altitude. Then they came to Manitou, and feeling so much better, with her old waywardness she had insisted upon resuming her former habits, not believing that she lacked the power. In spite of all entreaties, she had mounted that horse she had not had strength to ride. Well, Gray knew the rest.

The elder man talked to the younger as a kind brother might have done. He advised work as the only panacea for sorrow; he told him time would help him. Well the mentor knew that the impressionable young fellow would soon forget the woman who, had she lived, might have wrought his ruin, as she had that of others. He knew that this burst of grief was only a tempest of the April nature which, as yet, had not, and might never be capable of finding, a serious affection. So when the young man thanked him for his counsel and sympathy, but said that he could never love another as he had loved Alice, Gray smiled to himself, and he was not surprised when six months later he saw, in a society paper, the announcement of the engagement of Frederic Fortescue, son of Caleb Fortescue the millionaire, to Julia, daughter of George Steppington, also of San Francisco.

There is in Colorado Springs a grave that attracts notice by its pathetic simplicity. A

red sandstone boulder, upon which is inscribed in white letters, in a running hand, the words, "Mildred's Mother." The mossy bank around the stone is dotted with English daisies, and a wild vine hangs in festoons over the rustic fence which encloses the grave of the woman who came to her tragic death in The Garden of the Gods.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was spring again in Washington. April, this year more precocious than usual, seemed to have borrowed the steadier smile of May, the sun had dried any dampness which the constant showers of the previous week might have left upon the face of nature, and it shone this Easter Monday as fair and serene as could be wished by the small Washington world, delighted to find that no rain would interfere with their time-honored custom of rolling eggs down the grassy bank behind the White House to the music of the Marine Band. For days previous the children had been in a flutter of excitement, wondering if it would be fine Easter Monday, and consulting every one as to the probability; coloring eggs themselves, or watching the process, investing their pocket-money in eggs, or baskets in which to carry the former, and deeply interested, as well as their mothers, in the gala attire proper for the occasion. Eager little faces had frequently peered into the window of a prominent florist, whose *fac-simile* in white flowers of the Executive Mansion, upon ground of moss, with dolls per-

sonating children, and eggs of every hue scattered over the green, had been the admiration of all who saw this triumph of floral art. And now the reality of the occasion quite equalled, if it did not surpass, the hopes of all. It was a pretty sylvan picture, upon which pedestrians, pursuing their way along the broad pavement, frequently paused to gaze. Many, attracted by the sound of music, laughter, and the chatter of voices, entered the open gate and swelled the crowd within. It was a motley throng of rich and poor, of high and low, children of larger growth mingled with the smallest. They were in full force, of every type, from the purest Anglo-Saxon to that of "Darkest Africa," all enjoying the freshly scented air, laden with the perfume of lilac, hawthorn, and other early blossoms. Every one seemed to feel the influence of the delicious spring weather, at which even the most inveterate grumbler could not cavil, for it was neither too warm nor in the least chilly. A day which, as more than one present had remarked, seemed to have been made expressly for the children to enjoy their egg-rolling.

Youthful flower venders, both black and white, offered bunches of May-blossoms and violets to all they met. They were jostled by other boys, who, in ear-splitting tones, announced the various newspapers they had for

sale. One pedestrian, who had been persistently followed by a mite of a flower-boy, abstractedly threw into the tray a coin far exceeding in value the bunch of violets he selected and fastened in the lapel of his coat. Then, pursued by a number of flower-boys of whom he took no notice, he crossed the avenue and was about to enter Lafayette Square, but he paused, turned, and surveyed the line of white marble architecture facing him, which now came out in strong relief against the bluest of skies. At this moment, between the herdicks, hansoms, cabs, and private carriages which were rolling over the asphalt, too smooth for the comfort or the safety of horses' feet, an open landau dashed by, drawn by a pair of spirited strawberry roans. The carriage contained a lady in deep mourning, a red-gold curly head opposite, and a face, the glimpse of which caused the heart of the man who looked at it to beat tumultuously. He made a rapid impulsive movement as though to stop the carriage, then, realizing the futility of any such attempt, with a sigh of disappointment, entered the park.

Herbert Gray dropped into a seat near the bronze statue of "Old Hickory" on his horse, in the place of honor which should, by right, belong to the statue of America's French ally of the revolutionary days, for whom the square was named. The hero of New Orleans

surely deserves to be the central figure of a Jackson Square in the city which abounds in statues of the country's great men, each placed in circles and parks bearing their names. If he had not been otherwise preoccupied, some such thoughts might have run through the mind of the man whose cheek was being brushed by the sweet blossoms of the tree which shaded him from the powerful rays of the sun, but as he sat there the soft languor induced by the perfumed air and his own weariness stole over him. In his mind he reviewed the events that had passed since he was last in Washington. He thought of that agonizing parting with the woman to whom he longed to tell the passionate love he felt for her. He thought of the weary months of travel and of fruitless search for the woman to whom his folly and duty chained him until death should part them. Then came the last act in the tragedy of his life, the sudden meeting, in nature's most sublime theatre, with that woman, from whom that instant parted him forever. It all passed before him, this cyclorama of his married, his unhappy, broken life, and now he was waiting for the happy moment which should bring his meeting with the only woman he had ever truly loved, the rapturous moment when he could tell her all his heart contained of long pent-up accumulated feeling. He had not written to announce

his coming, he had wished to surprise his friends. He had learnt from the recent letters of his sister, Mildred, and Mrs. Leigh-Scott, that Stella was again the latter's guest, and with that confidence which expectant hearts will feel, he had not thought of the very natural event of this beautiful weather tempting those he sought to be "out driving," which was the response he had received when he had called at the well-known house. The neat capped maid-servant who had answered his ring instead of Jimmie, whom he had expected to see, knew nothing of the destination of the ladies. She could not say if it were Arlington, The Soldiers' Home, or to Mount Vernon that Mrs. Leigh-Scott, Miss Fontaine, and Miss Mildred had gone—but her mistress had said they would not return until dinner-time.

Hoping to find his sister, Herbert Gray next bent his steps to the Seminary of the Holy Cross. Again he was doomed to disappointment: Sister Lucia was sitting with a sick pupil at the other end of Washington, and as it was Easter Monday she might remain all day. But the good Mother Superior for whom he next inquired, taking pity upon the disappointment of the fond father, that Mildred was also absent, entertained him with reports of the child's progress in her studies and how they all loved their dear little pupil—the youngest in the

school ; she already played the harp and was very proud that she could execute the very piece which Stella Fontaine, who had been a pupil of the Sisters in their convent school in Indiana, had played at the same age. Stella Fontaine often came to practise the harp ; she was very fond of Mildred and Mildred of her. Had he ever met Miss Fontaine ? The moments flew so rapidly in his interest in all which the good woman had to tell that Herbert Gray heard to his surprise the bell sounding for service in the chapel, which warned him that he was trespassing upon precious time. With many apologies for his long visit he took his leave and sauntered slowly to the White House grounds, where, for half an hour or more he strolled about looking at the assembled children, half fancying he might see among them his golden-haired Mildred, the bright thread, as she had ever been, in the dark texture of his life. Then, as already told, he crossed over into the park.

If a Pygmalion of these days could invent a process by which that bronze Andrew Jackson could be made to talk, what interesting romances he might tell, the scene of which would be laid in Lafayette Square ! A chapter in a life drama was unfolded before Herbert Gray, as he sat there half concealed by the foliage, an involuntary witness of a meeting which, had he

been out of ear-shot and unacquainted with the parties, might have passed for accidental. He had been present some three years before at the grand Easter wedding, which gave into the arms of a dissipated, worn-out bridegroom, older than her father, the spring-flower bride who had been boycotted by her ambitious, worldly mother into throwing over the man of her heart and selling that discordant organ for a fine establishment. Even society had shuddered in a well-bred way over the monstrosity of this union, and there had been bets made at the club as to the chances of the girl's holding out and remaining true to her lover.

To-day Herbert Gray saw the beautiful victim of cupidity, embellished by all the adornment of fashionable dress, walk slowly along the path a short distance from him, and, as she cast a rapid glance around her, come in violent contact with one of two conversationally pre-occupied politicians, each of considerable *avoir-dupois*.

"That cost him the vote of——"

The abrupt termination of the sentence was caused by the speaker nearly upsetting the owner of the lace parasol—worth a small fortune,—who had been equally oblivious of his presence. After mutual apologies, the lady took a seat a short distance from the spot and the two men passed on, one remarking: "Lucas

is playing whist at the club and his young wife having a rendezvous in the Square." "Such sweet stolen meetings boom Dakota," said his companion smiling. Just then, from the opposite path, came the department clerk whose name had been connected with the beautiful young wife, and Herbert Gray saw the meeting of the two who were evidently all the world to each other.

Two girls in all the arrogance of youth and beauty, in fresh spring attire, approached, and bits of their conversation floated on the air.

"I tell mother that it would n't cost us as much to live abroad as it does here; I want to see those dear beautiful blue-and-silver creatures Annie writes about. Perhaps I might be lucky and get a marked-down baron,—who knows!" and laughing and coloring as the amused smile on Herbert Gray's face told that he had heard the words, the speaker, linked arm in arm with her companion, passed on.

"Hollo!" the long-drawn-out word in the familiar voice, the outstretched hand which seized his in a hearty grasp, were not unwelcome to the man who on his return home had as yet found no face to greet him.

"Have you been all over the world? How you young fellows do like to dissipate in Paris—much better stay at home and get married."

"I presume you have done so, since you recommend it," said Herbert Gray, smiling and ignoring the rest of Scott's remark.

"I should rather think I had," replied Maurice Scott, as the two seated themselves, "Been married a year, and got a splendid baby too," he added, his face beaming with parental pride.

"Indeed, I congratulate you," repeated the other,—“boy?”

"No, a girl; she weighed twelve pounds and a quarter when she was born; we called her Mauritia Constance. Pretty name, is it not?"

"Very," was the reply.

"Uncommon, too, the first at least. We think of getting out a copyright on that name. While I was wishing baby had been a boy, to be called after me, I saw something in the papers about the Mauritian Isles and that gave me the idea."

"I congratulate you upon its euphony and originality," said Herbert. "Mauritia also harmonizes very well with the second name, Mrs. Leigh-Scott's, I believe."

"Yes, she was godmother; the christening took place on Washington's birthday. But I must be moving; I promised Mrs. Scott to look after Bessie, our other daughter, who went with some friends to the White House grounds. Bessie Harding is a stunner, tall for twelve years

old, good, healthy girl with plenty of sense; she's got several years more at school and then she'll be a nice wife for some young fellow. Come on, and let me introduce you to Bessie."

"Thanks, not to-day," Herbert Gray replied, "I begin to feel the need of some support for the inner man. Come with me to Welcker's and have some terrapin."

"Terrapin!" echoed the other in alarm. "My dear fellow, I don't wonder you look so run down, living on such indigestible food. We take our boiled mutton or beefsteak at two o'clock here, as we do at Clearbrook. Come and join us some day. I am a family man now, and must take care of my health. Take my advice, settle down and get married. Nothing like a wife to keep a man straight."

"I believe you are right," replied Herbert Gray, smiling.

"Are you going to bring up your daughter a Roman Catholic—I hear she is at school with the nuns?" Maurice Scott suddenly asked.

"My sister took charge of Mildred when I was obliged to go away on business which would not permit of my taking the child with me."

"Are you not afraid of the religious influence upon her?"

"The best women I ever knew, my mother and sister, were Roman Catholics," was the short reply.

"Would n't they have been just as good if they had been Protestants?"

"Probably; the creed is of little consequence, Protestant or Catholic, it's all one to me; if Mildred grow up with high principles I shall be satisfied."

But the conversation left an unpleasant effect, and as Herbert Gray partook of the delicious dish served at the famous restaurant, to which, after parting with Maurice Scott, he betook himself, his former scruples with regard to his sister's influence over his child came back to him. He was jealous of a creed which he vaguely feared might deprive him of Stella, who he knew had been brought up a Roman Catholic; he was glad to remember he had frequently seen her coming out of St. John's Church with her hostess.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Mrs. Leigh-Scott returned home she was met by Jimmie, making signs to her that he wished for a private interview in the dining-room. There, occupying the centre of the table laid for dinner, was the most wonderful floral design imaginable! Upon a bank of maidenhair fern, stood a harp composed of golden carnations with strings of small flowers of the same color, and across them in fine lettering of forget-me-nots, the words, "Home, Sweet Home." The harp was surmounted by a star of orange blossoms, and at its base lay a heart of pansies.

To her exclamation of surprise and delight Jimmie answered: "De flowers is nonimus." He had been asked by Mr. "Nonimus" to "put a bunch of violets on Miss Stella's dressing-table hisself and tell nobody. He 'vited hisself to dinner to-day," added Jimmie.

Mrs. Leigh-Scott stood in Stella's dressing-room and took from the table the bunch of violets which Jimmie had placed there. "How sweet they will look on the dress you wore at the concert a year ago. 'T is here, you

know, as pretty as ever ; an Empire gown keeps its own fashion ; you left it behind you when you went home ; wear it at dinner to-night." Stella gave her hostess a reproachful look.

"Nonsense, my child," said Mrs. Leigh-Scott. "You have sung the song of despair long enough—let your heart take up a brighter strain to accompany the music of its sweet singer."

To Stella's quick inquiring glance her hostess only smiled as she said: "Trust your own heart, Stella," and left the room.

When the clock struck seven, Herbert Gray rang the bell of the well-known house in H Street, a bunch of violets in the button-hole of his coat ; his classic face was pale as the white tie of his evening dress. Jimmie, with a grin of welcome, ushered him into the untenanted library. From the music room beyond came the faint echoes of the harp.

He sprang up the three steps, pushed aside the curtain, and the next moment pressed passionately to his heart the form which, longing for the kiss of rapture, he had held in his arms for an instant, on that very spot. Then, honor had forbidden that kiss ; now, his enduring love had earned the right to bestow it.

"And the beating of their own hearts was all the sound they heard,"—those two who, seated beneath the frescoed Loves and Graces, were looking so intently into each other's eyes, that

they did not note the presence on the threshold of one who had brought their two divergent lives into the same current. The tall, graceful form, clad in violet and silver brocade, diamonds flashing from her hair, throat, and corsage—a gala dress worn that day in honor of the return of her long-absent guest,—stood for a moment contemplating the picture of happy love, life's most exquisite symphony, so seldom played without some discord.

Youth and love! Ah, were both eternal, what need would mortals have of heaven? Would not earth be heaven?

Dropping the curtain, she noiselessly turned back into the library with a sigh, as the words of Ella Wheeler Wilcox recurred to her:

“ There never was success so nobly gained,
Or victory so free from earthly dross,
But, in the winning, some one had been pained,
And some one suffered loss.

“ There never was a bridal morning fair,
With Hope's blue skies and Love's unclouded sun,
For two fond hearts, that did not bring despair
To some sad other one.”

The “sad other one” sat down in a large arm-chair drawn up in front of the wood fire, which the chilliness of the afternoon of the beautiful April day rendered agreeable. The flickering flame brought her pictures of her past life. She saw again the days of her child-

hood and of her girlhood, the large hospitable mansion, with its gay family circle now scattered by estrangement and death. She recalled the brilliant ball in Washington, shortly after the end of the War of the Rebellion, the handsome young hero of one of its most gallant actions, whose honorable scar, in her eyes, had outshone the glittering decorations on the breast of any foreign diplomat. That evening had settled her fate and his. She recalled all the experience of her married life spent in "following the drum." How she had enjoyed its pleasures and excitement and made light of its privations! Then came death in life, when, with the loss of her soldier-husband, the light of her heart went out. Constance Leigh-Scott never heard the word "pneumonia" without a shudder; it brought to her the living over of those dreadful five days when strong vitality battled with tremendous will against the power of the fell disease; each death-foreboding breath sent a stab to her heart, as she listened in anguish, hoping against hope. Then came weeks and months of dull despair, when kind friends thought and acted for her, and tears seemed turned to stone as she lay in the apathy of mechanical existence. She had believed then that fate had done its worst, that she was dead to all feeling of suffering or of enjoyment—she had nothing more to lose. But after the loss

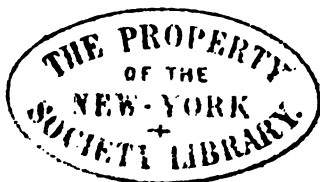
of her brother when she was realizing the full meaning of that most expressive word "alone," a heart's-ease had sprung up in her path and the chords of her heart vibrated again to the sympathetic touch of her David. And now she was called upon by fate to make a sacrifice of the *picciola* from the crannied wall of her heart; another claimed it and would pluck it from her. It was natural, it was right, since, according to the cruel law of nature, the happiness of one must be purchased with the unhappiness of another. But it was hard, doubly hard to see this gleam of sunshine shut out from her sky,—to be again alone.

Dreaming over the past and the present, she was almost as much absorbed as the pair so near and yet so far from her,—those to whom life was offering its fairest vista.

Jimmie, announcing dinner, was obliged to repeat the words and supplement them with a self-asserting cough before Mrs. Leigh-Scott was aware that he was standing at the door. She raised a warning finger as, at that moment, the air became filled with a burst of rapturous melody from that divinest instrument, the human voice. Then, after the joyous note had ceased, came the soft music of the harp so lately lonely and sad. But the chords were now those of gladness; the instrument had been

tuned anew with a key borrowed from the player's heart. She began with a low, tender melody; soon it glided into the familiar strains of "Home, Sweet Home," with which, as a child, she had touched the heart-strings of the man who now stood beside her, playing even then as David might.

THE END.





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